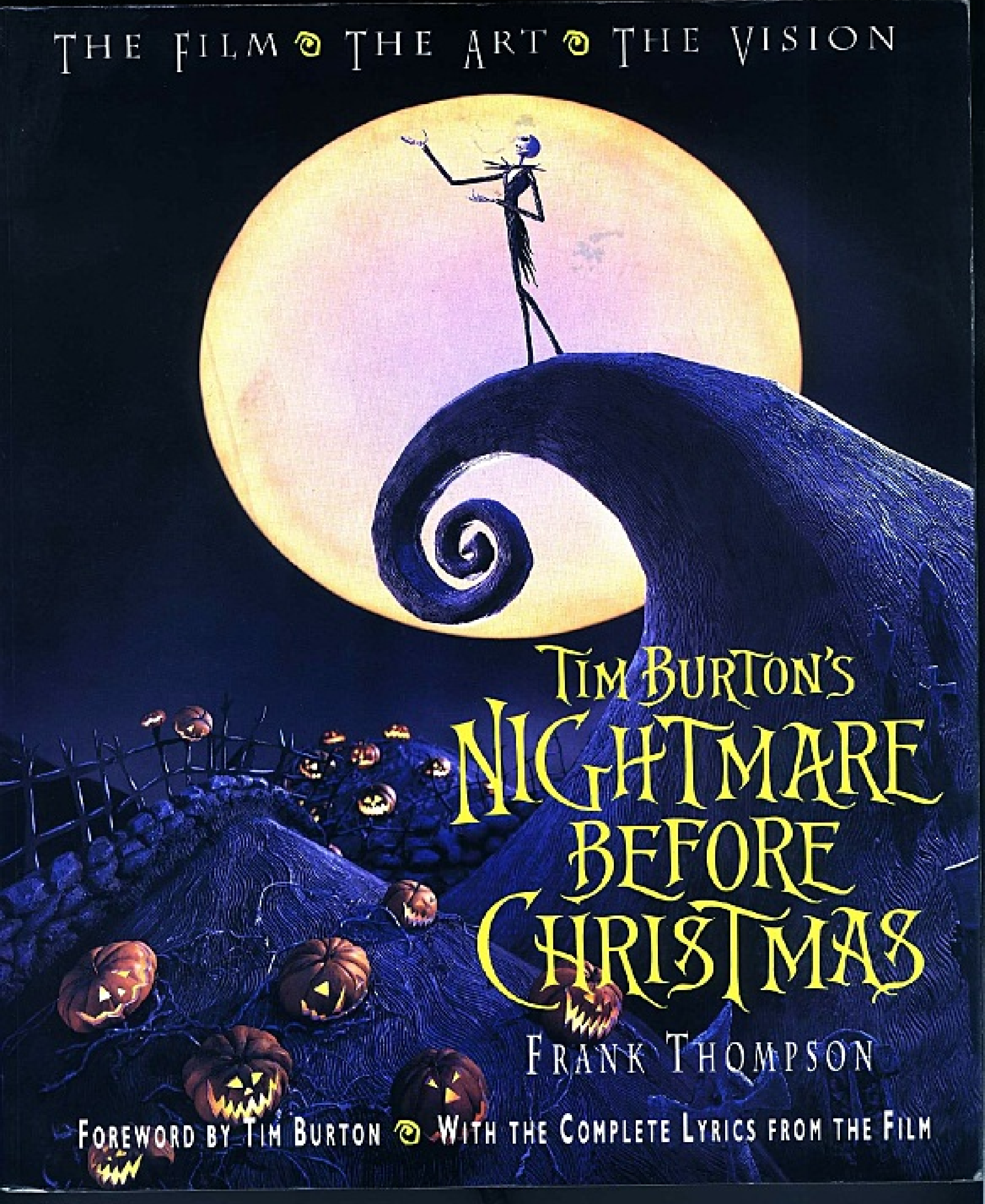
THE FILM ◎ THE ART ◎ THE VISION



TIM BURTON'S NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

FRANK THOMPSON

FOREWORD BY TIM BURTON ◎ WITH THE COMPLETE LYRICS FROM THE FILM

FOREWORD

Nightmare Before Christmas is a movie I've wanted to make for over a decade, since I worked as an animator at Walt Disney Studios in the early eighties. It started as a poem I wrote, influenced by the style of my favorite children's author, Dr. Seuss. I made several drawings of the characters and the settings and began planning it as a film.

I thought at first that *Nightmare Before Christmas* would make a good holiday special for television, although I also considered other forms, including a children's book. At the time, I think, it was too weird for Disney. I moved on to other things, but I never forgot it.

Although the title makes the film sound a little scary, I see *Nightmare Before Christmas* as a positive story, without any truly bad characters. The characters are trying to do something good and just get a little mixed up.

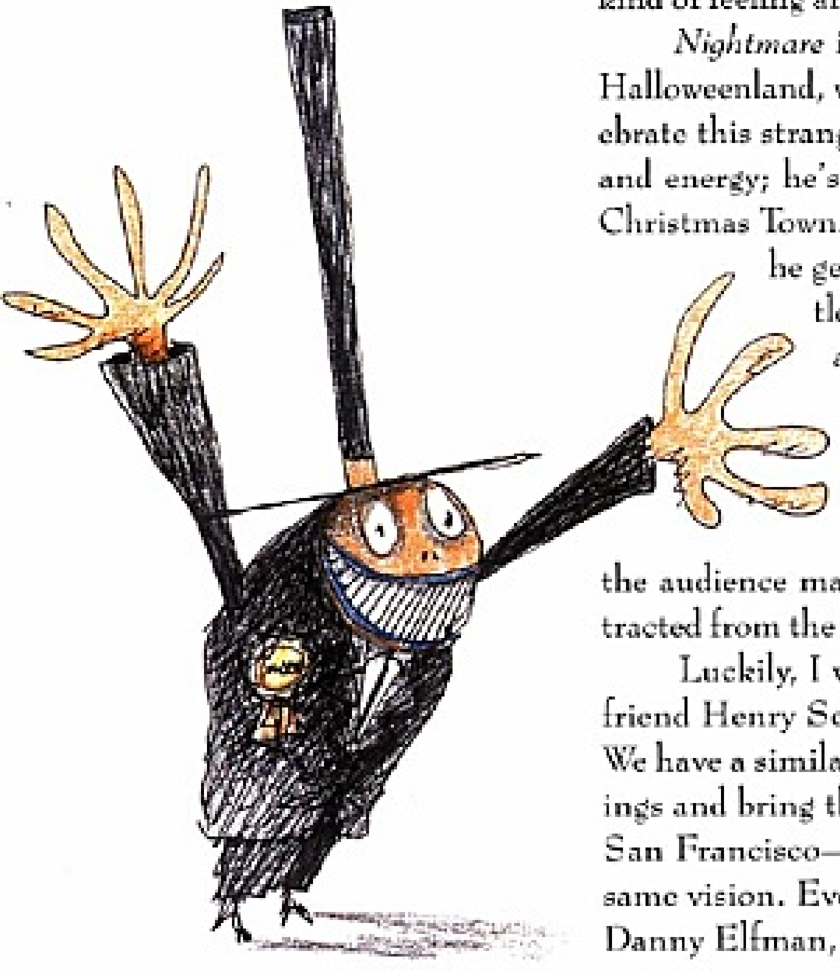
Like a lot of people, I grew up loving the animated specials like *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* that appeared on TV every year. I wanted to create something with the same kind of feeling and warmth.

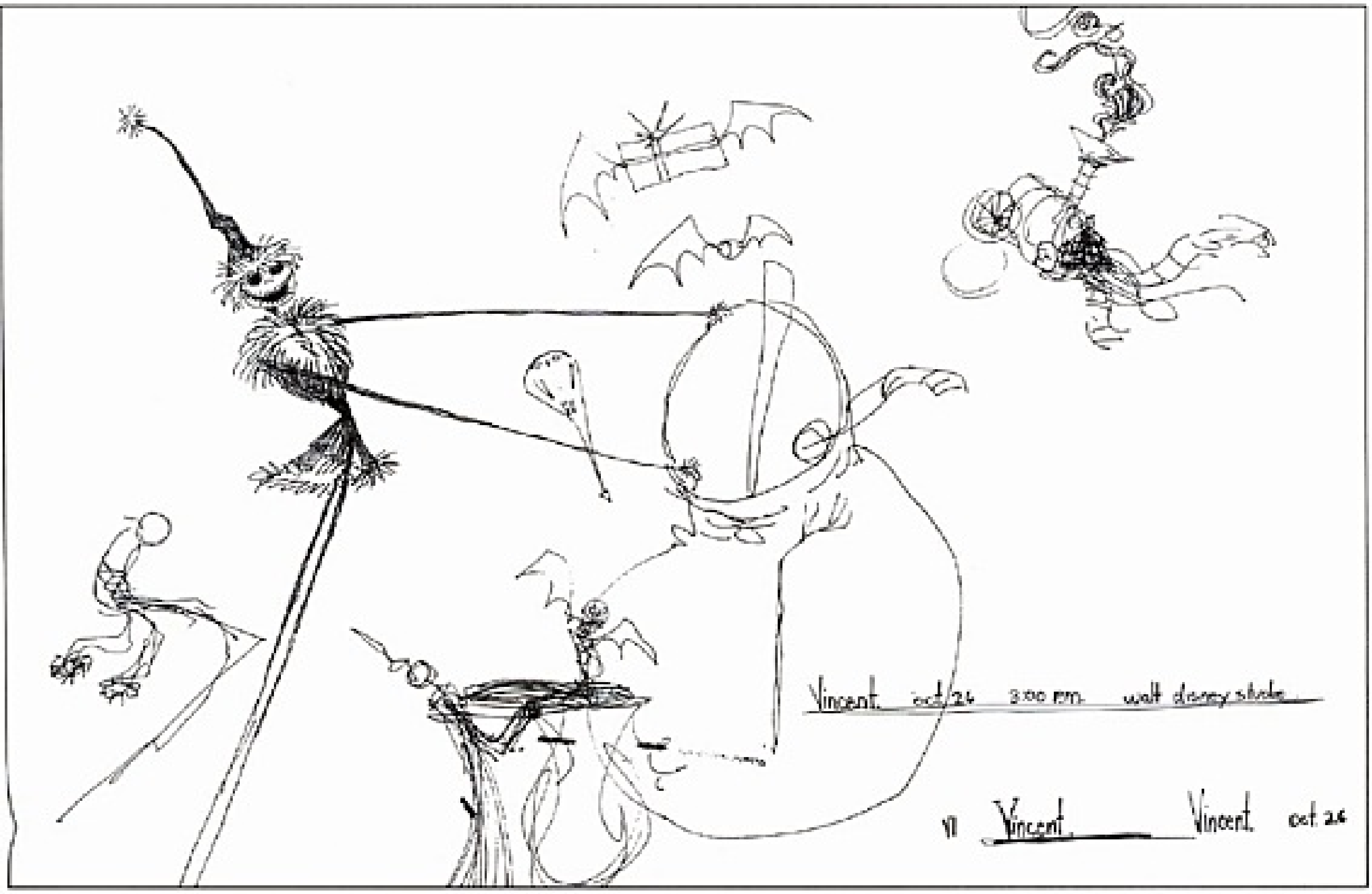
Nightmare is the story of Jack Skellington, the Pumpkin King of Halloweenland, who discovers Christmas and immediately wants to celebrate this strange holiday himself. I love Jack. He has a lot of passion and energy; he's always looking for a feeling. That's what he finds in Christmas Town. He is a bit misguided and his emotions take over, but he gets everybody excited. The setting may be odd and a little unsettling, but there are no real villains in the film. It's a celebration of Halloween and Christmas—my two favorite holidays.

I decided early on that I wanted to tell this story through stop-motion animation. I have always loved this medium, but it is challenging. One danger is that the audience may become overwhelmed by the technique and get distracted from the emotion.

Luckily, I was able to entrust *Nightmare Before Christmas* to my friend Henry Selick, the most brilliant stop-motion director around. We have a similar sensibility, and he was able to take my original drawings and bring them to life. He gathered together an amazing crew in San Francisco—a wonderful group of artists, all working toward the same vision. Everybody put their heart into it—Henry, the composer Danny Elfman, the screenwriter Caroline Thompson, the animators,

Tim Burton first sketched Jack Skellington, the movie's hero, in his notebook (opposite, top), over ten years ago, while he was making his short film Vincent *at Disney Studios. He later drew most of the other characters in* Nightmare*—including the Mayor (below) and Sally (opposite, bottom), shown in preliminary versions here.*

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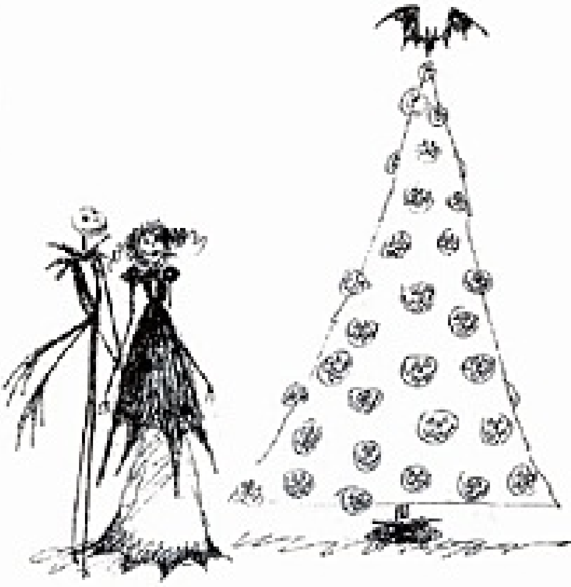
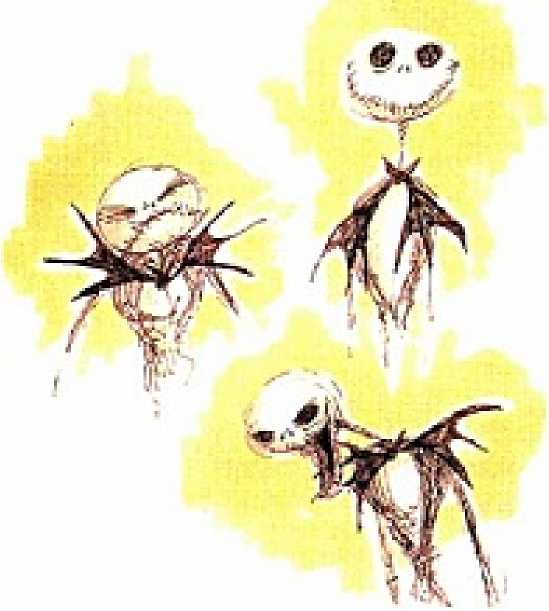
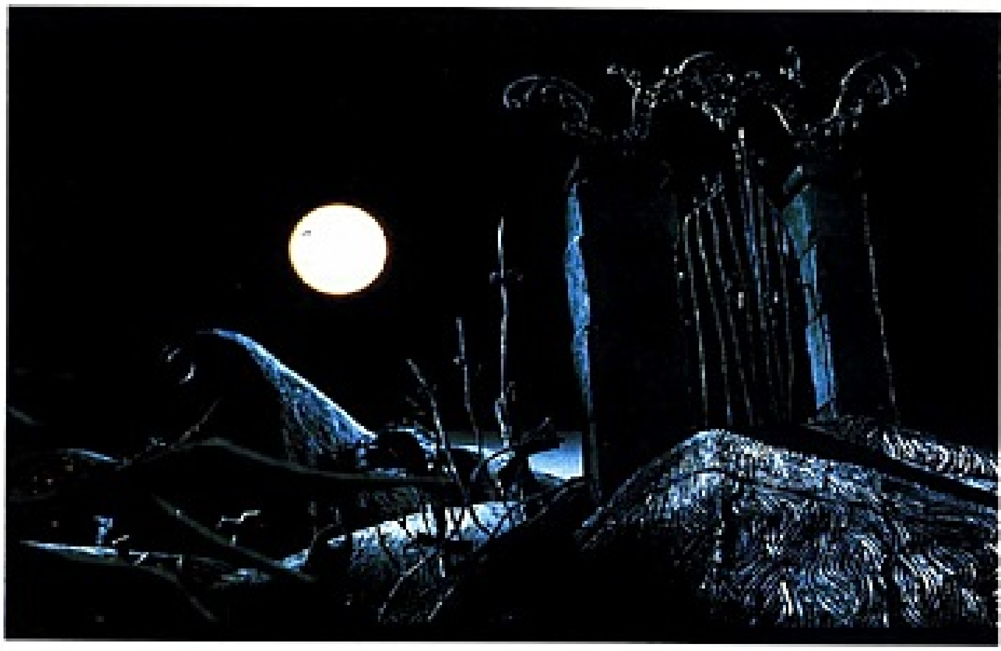
everybody down the line—making it an incredibly challenging, and rewarding experience.

Nightmare Before Christmas is deeper in my heart than any other film. It is more beautiful than I imagined it would be, thanks to Henry and his talented crew of artists, animators, and designers. As I watch it, I know I will never have this feeling again. *Nightmare Before Christmas* is special. It is a film that I have always known I had to make. More important, it is a film I have always wanted to see. Now I can. It has been worth the wait. I think there are few projects like that in your life.

Tim Burton







Jack Skellington has many sides to his personality, expressing a range of emotions, as Tim Burton's sketches (above) show. Early in the movie Jack wanders alone through the cemetery in Halloweenland (above right), singing a melancholy song.

INTRODUCTION

In every Tim Burton film there are a few elements you can count on. The script offers an eccentric, funny, and exciting mixture of goofiness and morbidity. The sets and costumes are heavily influenced by German Expressionism and the Universal horror films Burton loves so. The lead character is an outsider—"a loner . . . a rebel," as Pee-wee calls himself in *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* (1985)—someone who longs for a place in society that he can never fully occupy. And through the entire enterprise runs a healthy and audacious dose of irony.

In the case of *Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas,* the irony exists off screen as well as on. The movie is based on a poem that Burton wrote and illustrated over a decade ago, while he was working as an animator at Walt Disney Studios. Although at the time the Disney Company rejected the idea, today it is the film's enthusiastic producer.

Burton actually met the film's director Henry Selick at Disney Studios, where Selick was also an animator. Both were disillusioned with the work there and impatient with animating "cute little foxes." Now, they have joined forces to make an animated film for Disney in which there isn't a cute fox in sight. In fact, there isn't anything cute about *Nightmare Before Christmas.* It's just funny, a little scary, and unrelentingly creative.

In his early years at Disney, Burton "did not fit into the track of the average animator," notes Denise Di Novi, one of *Nightmare*'s producers.

She explains that Disney "saw very quickly that he was very creative and had unusual ideas." Yet when he left the studio, his ideas just went in a file somewhere.

Burton went on to become the director of such successful feature films as *Batman* (1989) and *Edward Scissorhands* (1990). But he retained his fondness for animation. And he kept his pet project—his poem "The Nightmare Before Christmas"—in mind.

From the start Burton wanted to produce *Nightmare Before Christmas* in stop-motion animation, a form that has never enjoyed wide popularity in the United States. "I love stop-motion," Burton exclaims. "There's always a certain beauty to it, yet it's unusual at the same time. It has reality. Especially on a project like *Nightmare,* where the characters are so unreal, it makes them more believable, more solid."

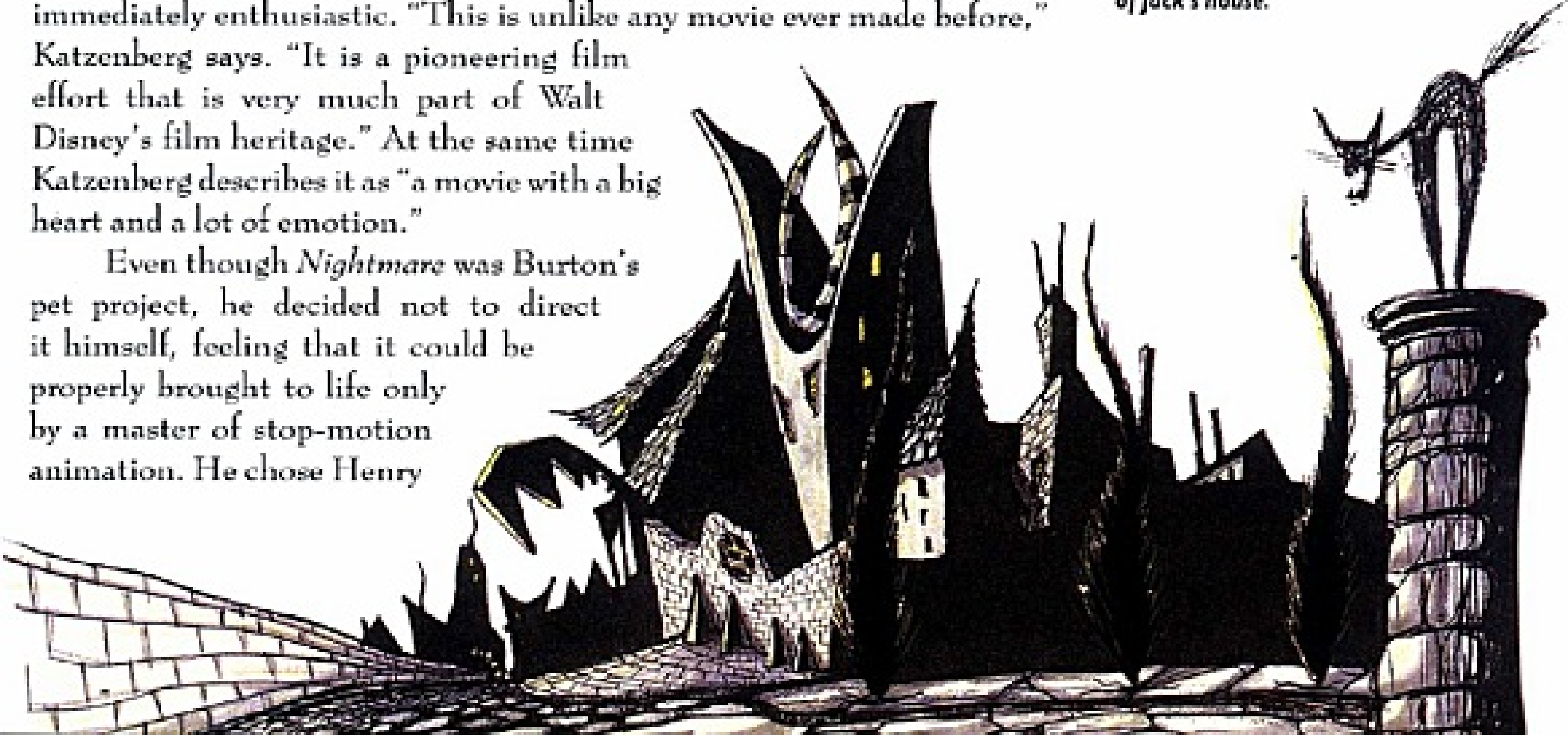
Burton admits that stop-motion is a challenging medium and points out that before doing *Nightmare,* "I'd never seen a stop-motion film that completely worked for me." But he was always convinced that stop-motion was perfect for his story about Jack Skellington and his misguided attempt to take over Christmas.

When Burton eventually decided to return to his pet project, he realized two things: Disney was the only studio successfully producing animated films, and because Burton came up with *Nightmare* while he was working at Disney, the studio owned it. Disney had, in the meantime, undergone a change in regime. Under Michael Eisner and Jeffrey Katzenberg, the studio had made a new commitment to animation—a drive that produced *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), and *Aladdin* (1992).

Taking a second look at Burton's original proposal, Katzenberg was immediately enthusiastic. "This is unlike any movie ever made before," Katzenberg says. "It is a pioneering film effort that is very much part of Walt Disney's film heritage." At the same time Katzenberg describes it as "a movie with a big heart and a lot of emotion."

Even though *Nightmare* was Burton's pet project, he decided not to direct it himself, feeling that it could be properly brought to life only by a master of stop-motion animation. He chose Henry

Halloweenland is full of jagged, pointed shapes. The drawing below shows an early version of the view just outside the gate of Jack's house.



A jaunty Jack returns to Halloween Town in a snowmobile stuffed with Christmas wares.

on clear sheets of celluloid, which are then laid over painted backgrounds. This method is called "cel animation." Both cel and stop-motion animation—when done right—create a separate image for each frame, and there are many similarities in the way the films are produced. But there is a major difference. Cel animation is essentially a two-dimensional art, while stop-motion animation uses three-dimensional "characters" that have a tangible physical presence. The figures are not drawn but built. And they do actually move (when an animator raises the puppet's leg or twists its arm).

Because it looks so different from traditional cel animation, *Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas* may appear to have been produced using a "new" technique. However, stop-motion animation has been around nearly as long as motion pictures have existed. It even predates conventional cel animation. No one is quite sure who made the first stop-motion animated film, but whoever it was saw the connection between the way film works and the way to make inanimate objects appear to come alive on screen.

In the early days of the cinema, motion picture cameras were operated with a hand crank. One complete turn of the crank exposed one frame of film. When shooting live action, the cameraperson simply kept a steady rhythm. The film, projected at the same speed, gave the illusion of natural motion. Films in the early twentieth century were usually shot at a rate of sixteen to twenty frames per second.

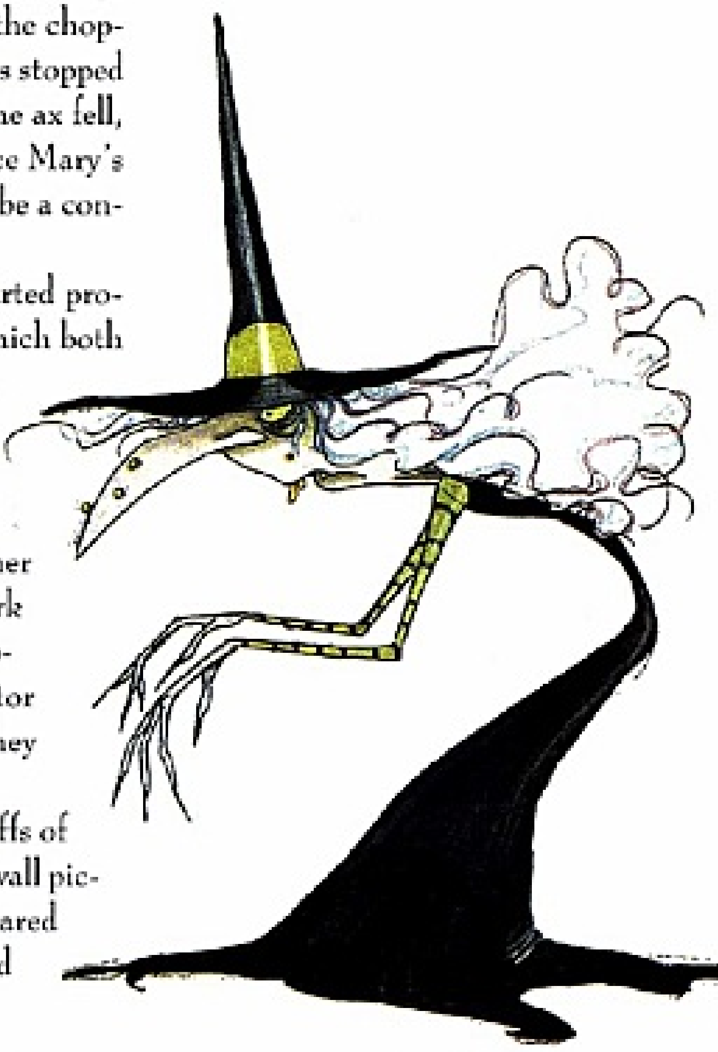
The first step toward animation was the discovery that if you stopped the camera, replaced the person or object being filmed with a different person or object, and started the camera again, a magical transformation took place. In 1895 the Edison Company illustrated this theory in a particularly grisly way. In a film called *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots,* the actress who played Mary was marched to the chopping block. When the executioner raised his ax, the camera was stopped and the actress was replaced by a dummy. Filming resumed, the ax fell, and a head tumbled. Audiences did not detect the trickery since Mary's approach to the chopping block and her beheading seemed to be a continuous series of actions.

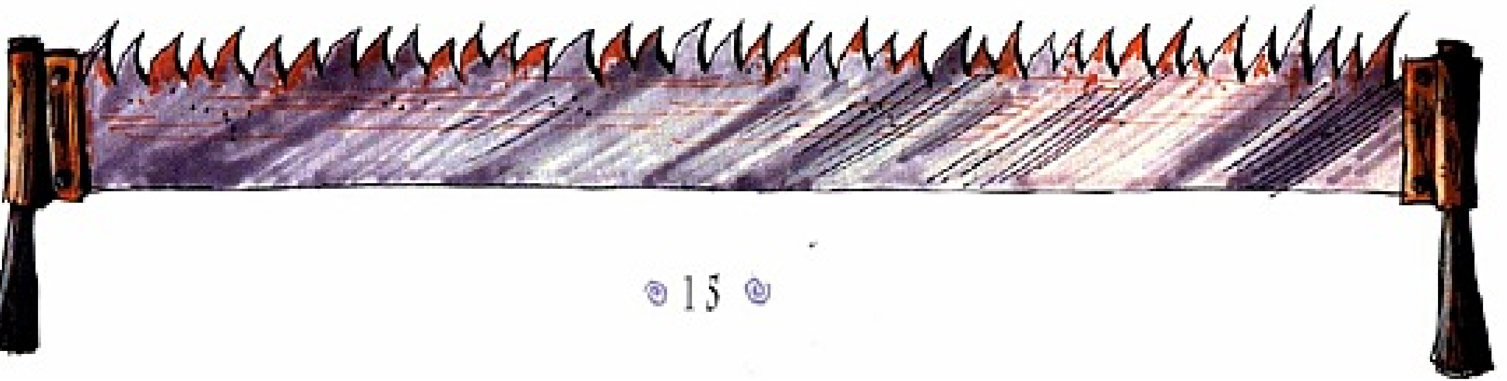
Once this secret got out, dozens of early filmmakers started producing "trick films"—cinematic versions of magic shows in which both people and objects were moved or transformed without the use of wires or mirrors. These works were not, at first, truly stop-motion films, but simply a way to make the impossible appear to happen.

In 1898 film pioneer J. Stuart Blackton and his partner Albert E. Smith were shooting a trick film on a New York rooftop. As they started and stopped the camera to make the substitutions, clouds of steam from the building's electrical generator drifted across the background. When they projected the film, they noticed that the clouds seemed to hop around the screen.

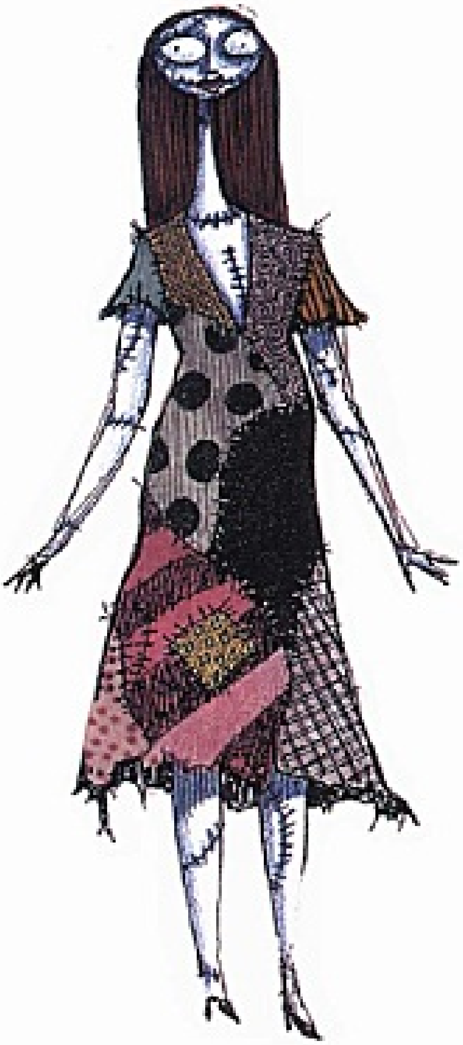
Smith later wrote, "These unplanned adventures with puffs of steam led us to some weird effects. In *A Visit to the Spiritualist* wall pictures, chairs and tables flew in and out, and characters disappeared willy-nilly—done by stopping the camera, making changes, and starting again."

Every character and object in the film evolved through sketches and color studies like these before being molded and painted in final, three-dimensional form. The saw below has been turned upside down from its position in the film to do its job here.





The real motion of the film takes place in between each frame as the animators slightly shift the puppets' positions. In a crowd scene like this one in Halloween Town, the animators may have to adjust twenty or more puppets before each take. Sally (shown below in a colored-in version of one of Tim Burton's black-and-white sketches) brings romance to Halloween Town.



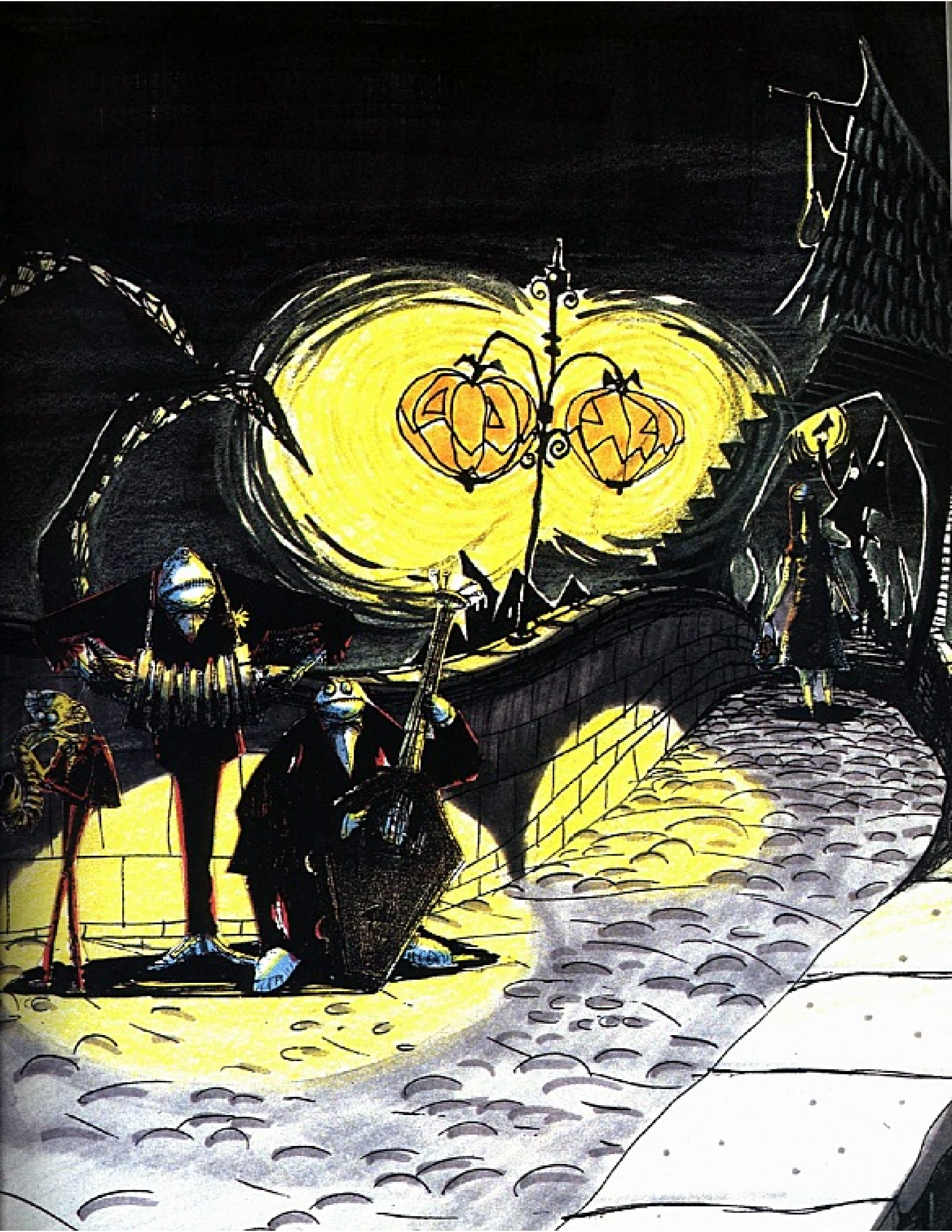
In 1898 Smith and Blackton produced what they claimed was the very first stop-motion film in the United States, *The Humpty Dumpty Circus.* As Smith described it, "I used my little daughter's set of wooden circus performers and animals, whose movable joints enabled us to place them in balanced positions. It was a tedious process in as much as the movement could be achieved only by photographing separately each change of position. I suggested we obtain a patent on the process. Blackton felt it wasn't important enough. However, others quickly borrowed the technique, improving upon it greatly."

Unfortunately *The Humpty Dumpty Circus* seems to have vanished—as have more than half the movies produced before 1950. But within a few years, stop-motion experiments were plentiful. The Russian animator Ladislas Starevich, for example, created some breathtaking (and oddly disturbing) stop-motion films in which he animated puppets of bugs, frogs, and other creatures.

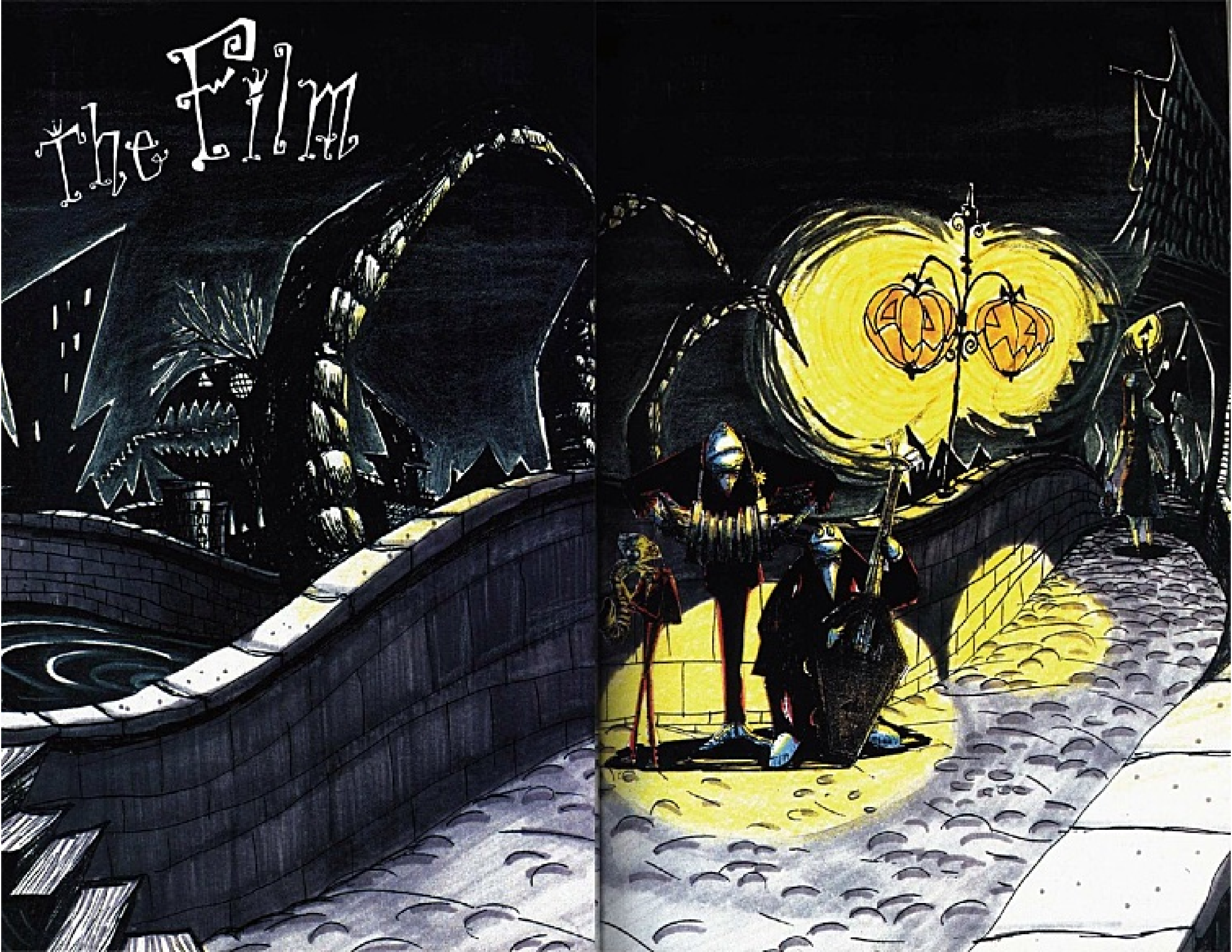
Other masters of stop-motion through the years include Willis O'Brien, the brilliant animator who gave life to King Kong in 1933, and O'Brien's protégé Ray Harryhausen, who created dazzling special effects for such fantasy classics as *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* (1958), and *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963).

George Pal was yet another stop-motion whiz. His "Puppetoons" of the thirties and forties are direct ancestors of *Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas.* Pal carved his puppets from wood and gave them dif-

The Film



The Film



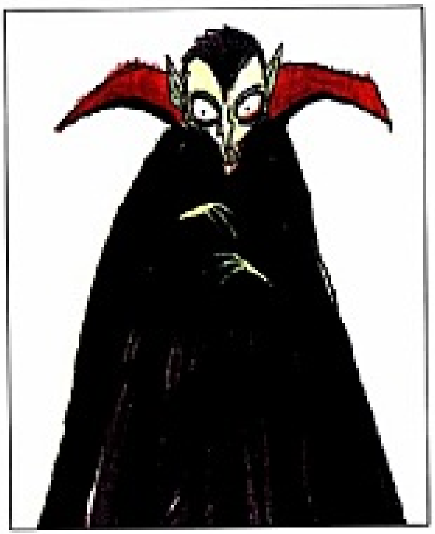
VAMPIRES 1, 2, 3, 4 (separately)
Halloween . . .
Halloween . . .
Halloween . . .
Halloween . . .

VAMPIRES (little, squeaky and high voices)
In this town, we call home,
Everyone hail to the Pumpkin Song!

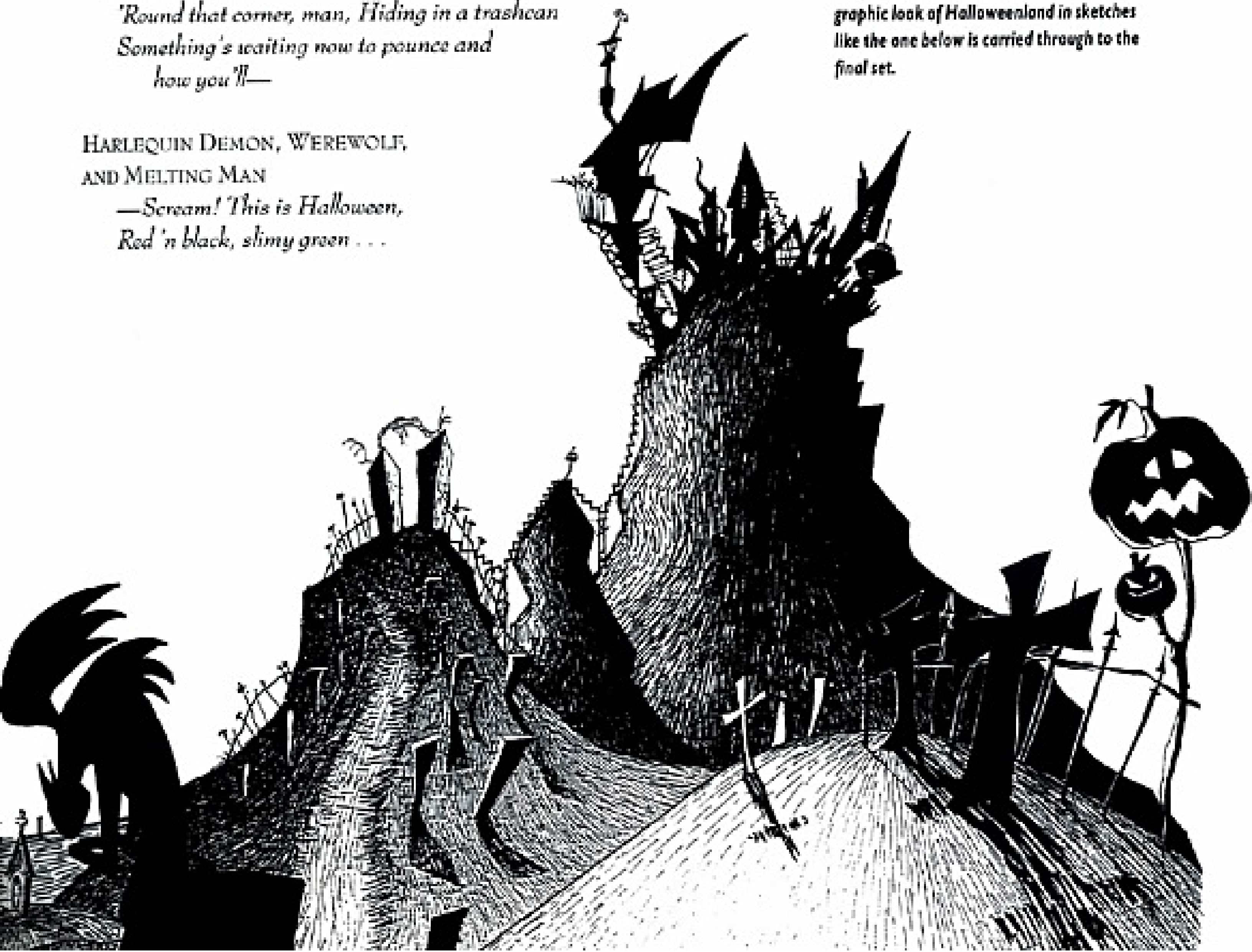
MAYOR
In this town, don't we love it now [optimistic]
Everybody's waiting for the next surprise [pessimistic].

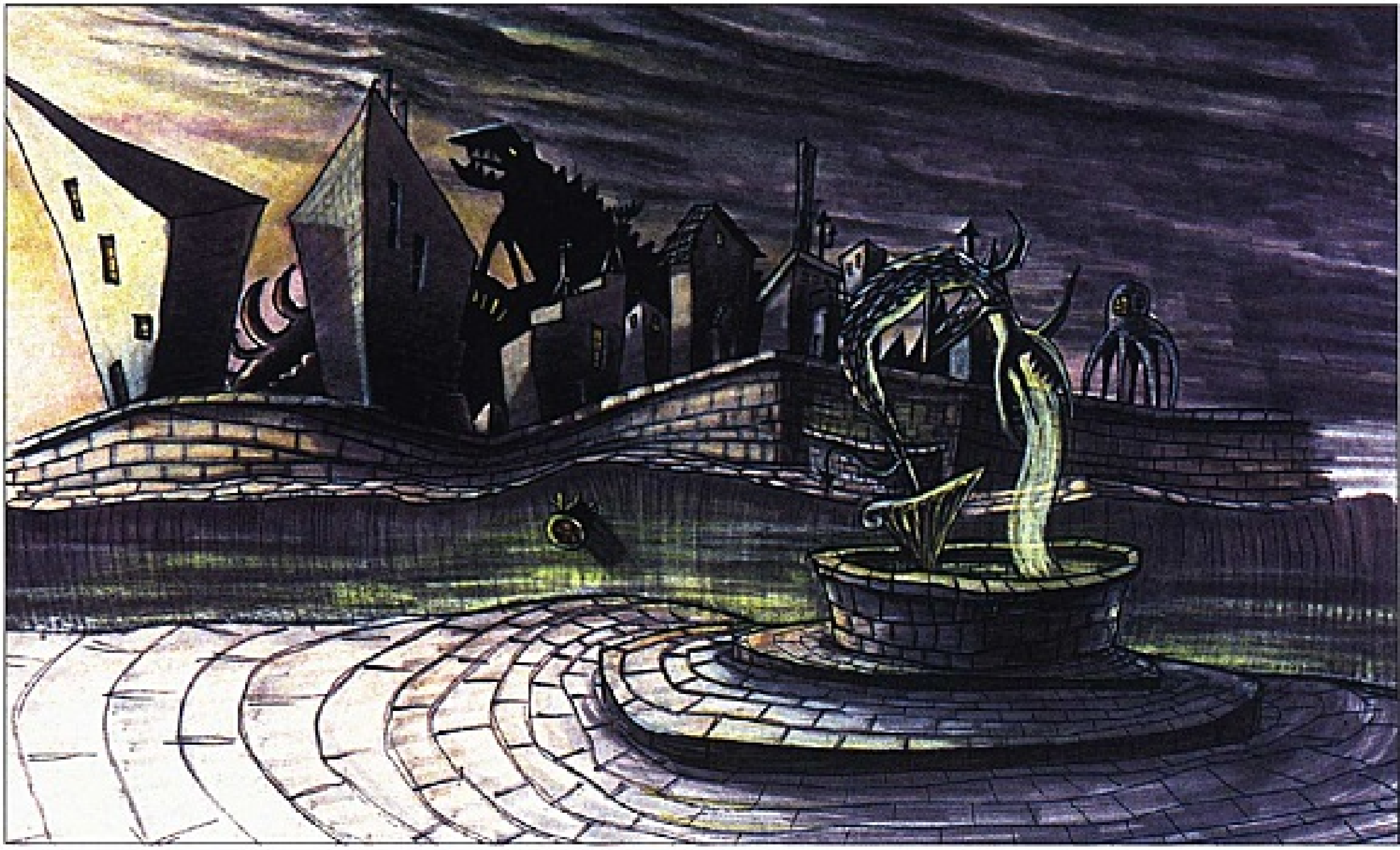
CORPSE CHORUS
'Round that corner, man, Hiding in a trashcan
Something's waiting now to pounce and
how you'll—

HARLEQUIN DEMON, WEREWOLF,
AND MELTING MAN
—Scream! This is Halloween,
Red 'n black, slimy green . . .

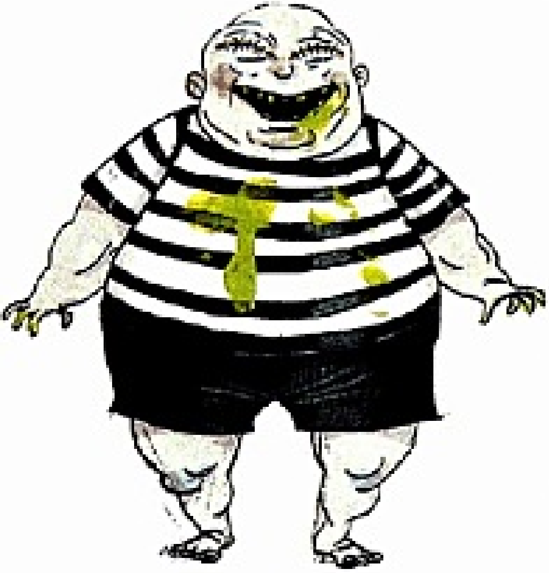


The Vampire's tiny, insectlike head is framed in blood-red above its huge black body in the final color design above. The graphic look of Halloweenland in sketches like the one below is carried through to the final set.





The eerie landscape of Halloweenland rises behind the drinking well in the Town Square (above). The Corpse Child (below) always has his eyes sewn shut.



CORPSE CHORUS
This is Halloween, This is Halloween
Halloween Halloween! Halloween Halloween!

CHILD CORPSE TRIO
Tender Lumplings everywhere
Life's no fun without a good scare.

PARENT CORPSES
That's our job, but we're not mean
In our town of Halloween.

CORPSE CHORUS
In this town—

MAYOR (optimistic)
—don't we love it now?

MAYOR WITH CORPSE CHORUS
Everyone's waiting for the next surprise.

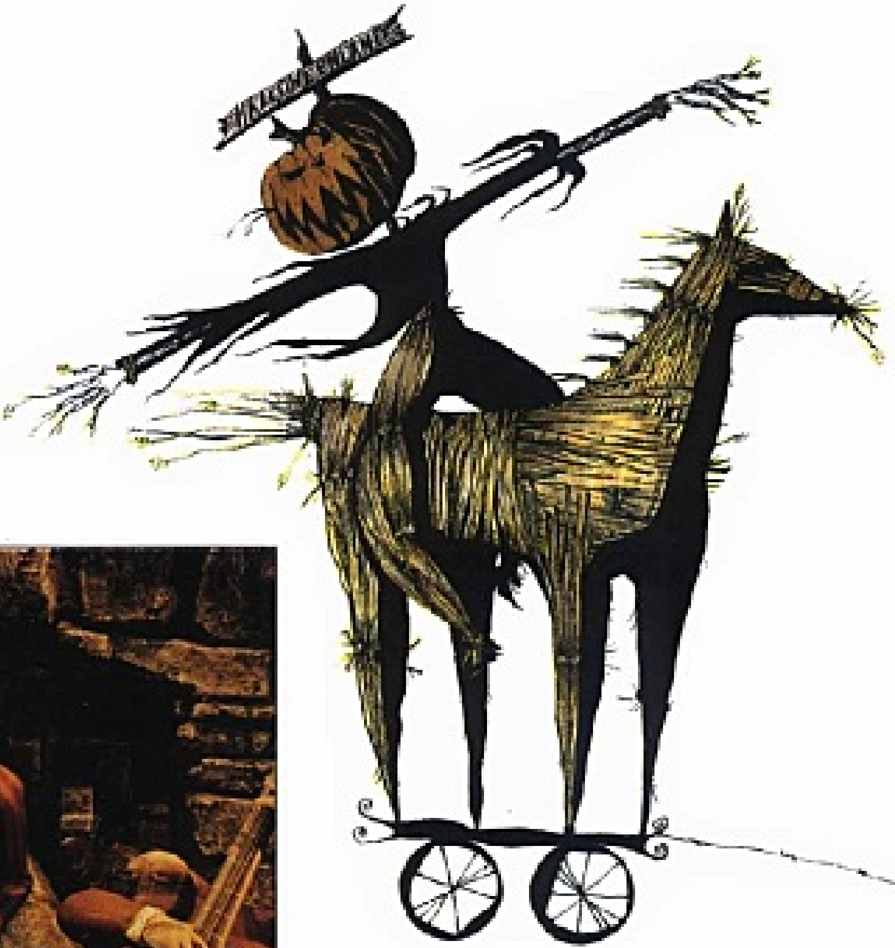
CORPSE CHORUS
Skeleton Jack might catch you in the back and
Scream like a banshee make you jump
out of your SKIN!
This is Halloween, everyone scream

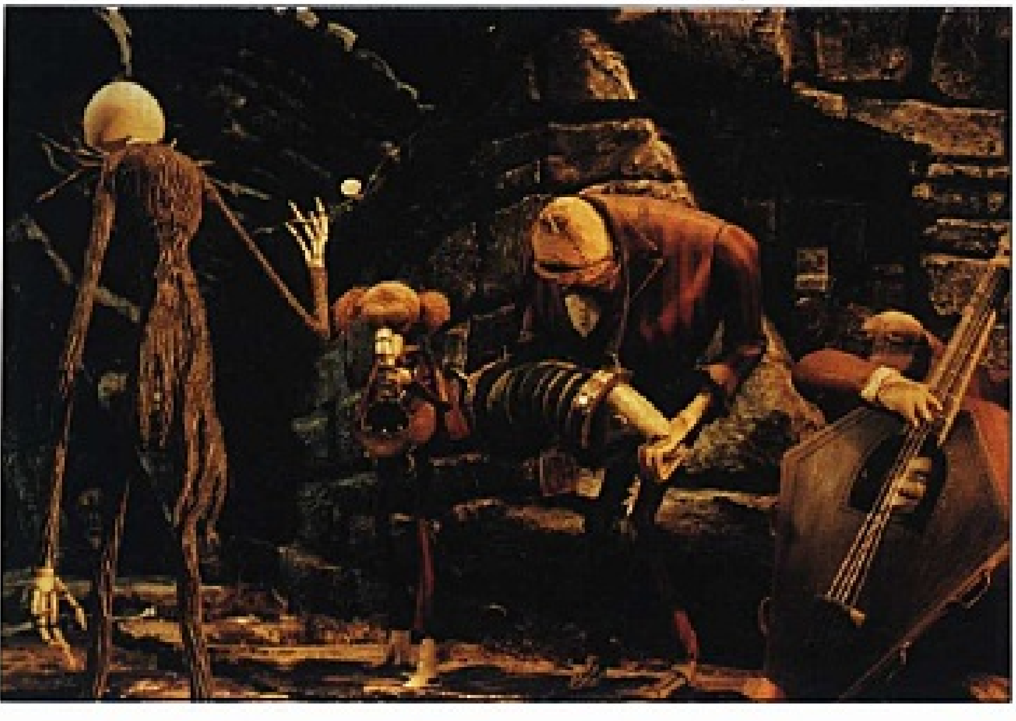
SALLY
Won't ya please make way for a special guy . . .

CORPSE CHORUS
Our man Jack is King of the Pumpkin Patch.
Everyone hail to the Pumpkin King now.

EVERYONE
This is Halloween, THIS IS HALLOWEEN
Halloween Halloween Halloween Halloween

CORPSE CHILD TRIO
In this place we call home
Everyone hail to the Pumpkin Song.





The scarecrow Pumpkin King (above) is pulled through the streets before he sets himself on fire and leaps into the fountain—to rematerialize as the gentlemanly Jack Skellington. After the celebration is over, Jack slowly walks away, tossing a coin to some street musicians (left).

Jack

Jack Skellington, the Pumpkin King of Halloweenland, is "tall and thin with a bat bow tie." He has a face like a skeleton and a genius for terror. But, at heart, Jack Skellington is a gentle, melancholy guy, tired of his crown and mournfully singing, "He would give it all up if he only could." He wants to do something more than scare people with his bloodcurdling scream.

"His melancholy comes from his loneliness and isolation," notes screenwriter Caroline Thompson, "from his feelings of 'been here, done that.' He's one of those people where everything seems to be going great on the outside but underneath he's pretty miserable."

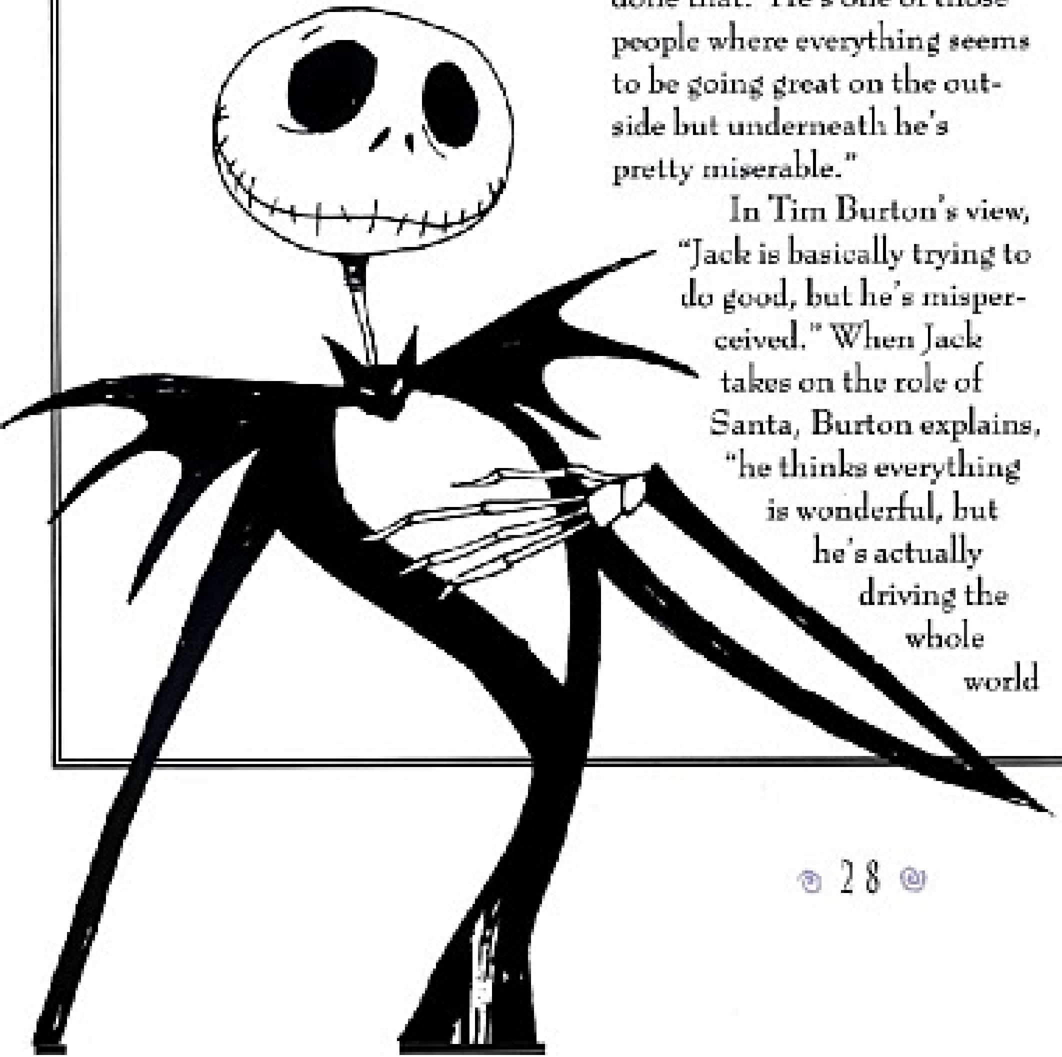
In Tim Burton's view, "Jack is basically trying to do good, but he's misperceived." When Jack takes on the role of Santa, Burton explains, "he thinks everything is wonderful, but he's actually driving the whole world into a state of panic. There's something very beautiful and sad and funny about that."

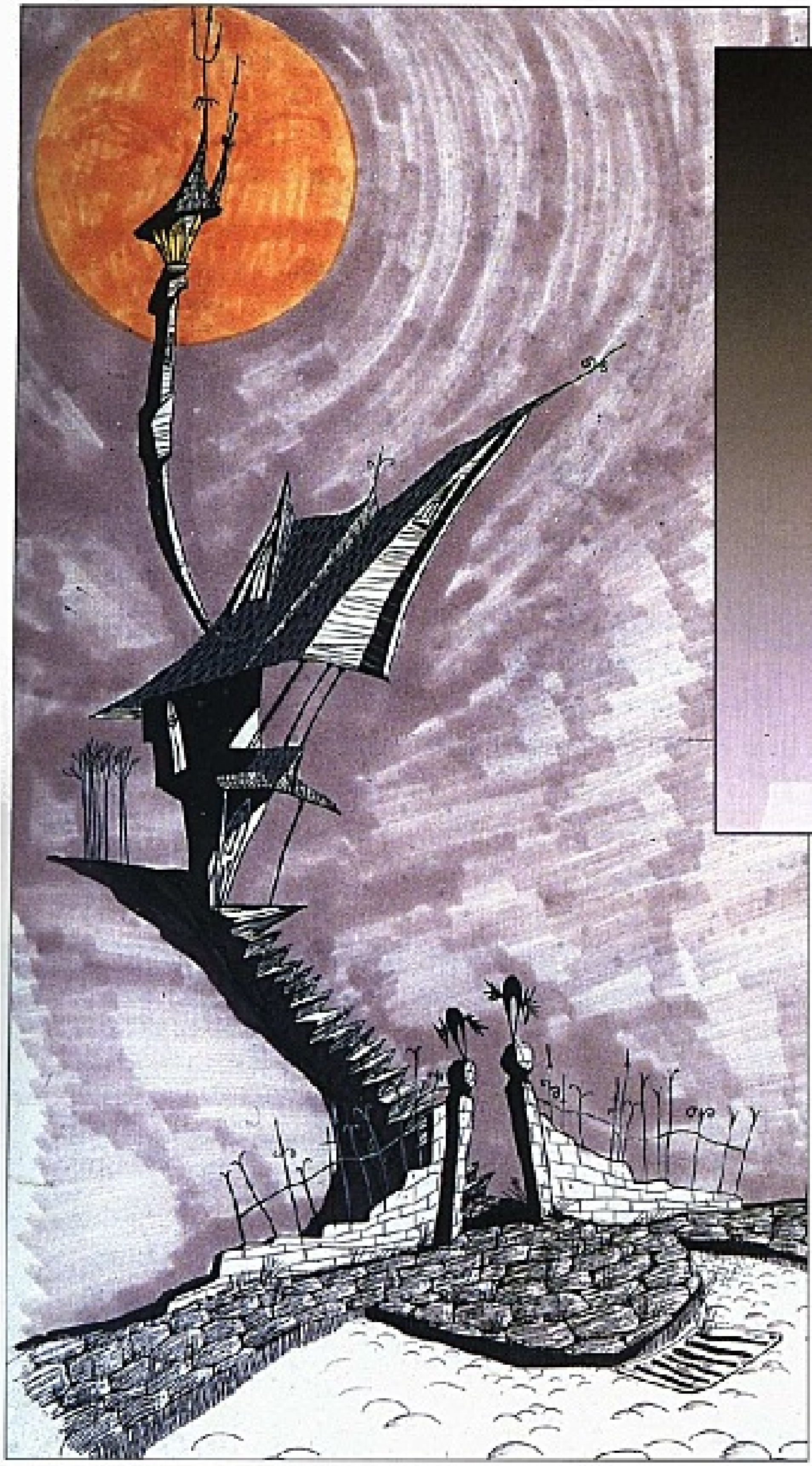
Jack Skellington has many different facets to his personality. When we first see him on the screen, before we know his importance to the story, it's Halloween, and Jack is dressed like a scarecrow with a large pumpkin head. He seems stiff and clumsy until he jumps into the fountain and reemerges, making his grand entrance as himself—quite debonair in his black-and-white striped suit with tails.

Throughout the film Jack shows us other aspects of his personality: he is depressed about the emptiness in his soul as he wanders through the forest, but then overcome with delight when he falls into the sparkling Christmas Town. He is a demonic little boy when he dresses up as Santa Claus and delivers ghoulish presents from his coffin sleigh and an avenging angel when he later roars into action to rescue Santa and set things right.

At first director Henry Selick thought that, with his skeletal frame, Jack would be impossible to design and ani-

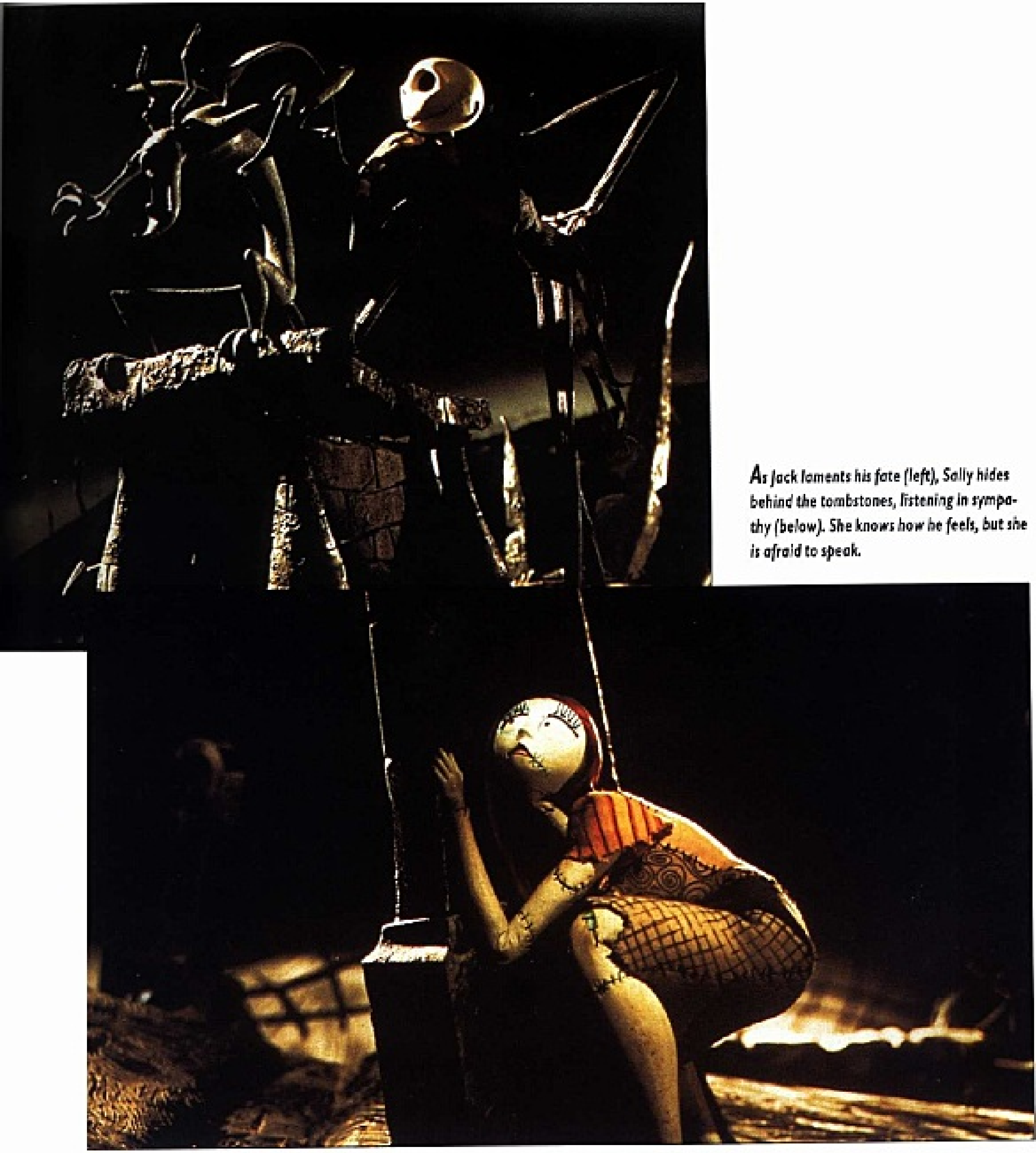
Jack's house (shown in the final design opposite) has a tall, spindly tower with a study on top—a fitting den for the almost impossibly thin puppet (opposite, top right).





mate. But he admits that Jack "ended up looking incredibly dapper, just as Tim intended, and he also moves elegantly."

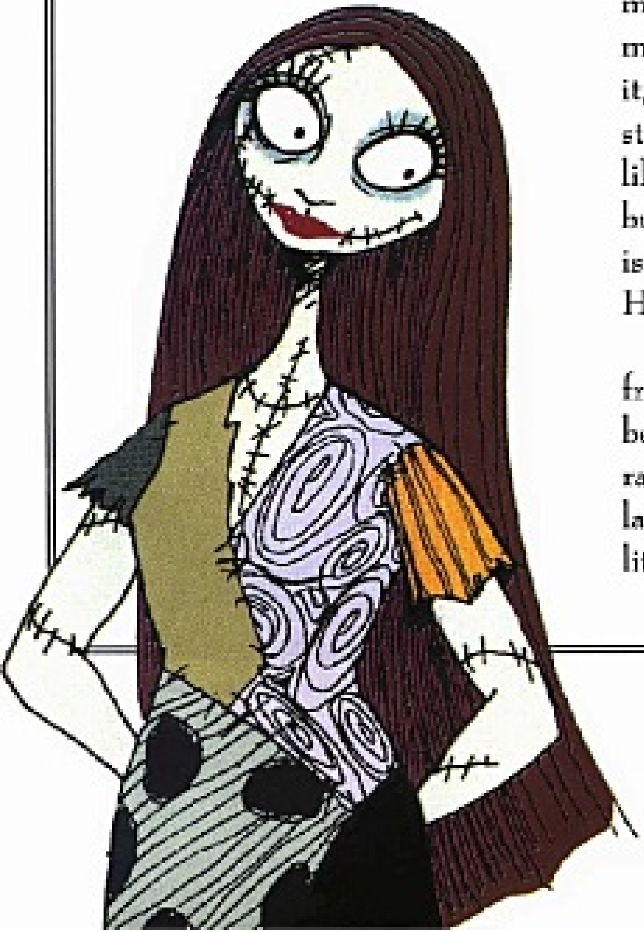
"There's a very definite style to the way Jack walks," adds animator Paul Berry. "It defines what his whole personality is about. He's this regal figure." Berry stresses the emotional quality of Jack's every movement. "When you animate Jack from the outside you have to deal with what's inside him as well."



As Jack laments his fate (left), Sally hides behind the tombstones, listening in sympathy (below). She knows how he feels, but she is afraid to speak.

Sally

Sally concocts a variety of brews in her kitchen in the Evil Scientist's lab (above right). In her room, by her window or on her bed, she thinks about Jack (opposite).



In a more conventional film, with a more conventional heroine, Sally might be little more than Jack Skellington's romantic interest. But in *Nightmare* she becomes Jack's kindred spirit, the only one who can truly understand how he feels.

Sally is essentially an animated rag doll. As John Reed, mold-making supervisor, puts it, "She's basically a Frankenstein-like puppet. She looks like she's sewn together from a bunch of scraps." Her balance is precarious. Her arms flop. Her mouth is a tragic slash.

Sally is certainly a far cry from conventional ideals of beauty. But she doesn't even raise an eyebrow in Halloweenland, where everybody looks a little . . . different.

"The Sally character came from something real deep in me," confesses Tim Burton, "a sort of weird impulse. She came out of drawings with this strange stitching image that I'd been thinking about for a while." He laughs, "I guess I work out a lot of psychological problems with these things."

"My first inclination was to make Sally a sort of little match girl, a will-o'-the-wisp," says Caroline Thompson. "But she seemed far too passive; there was no juice to her." At that early point, composer Danny Elfman had not yet written "Sally's Song," and, Thompson had to struggle to find a more arresting personality for Sally.

It wasn't until she looked at some early test footage that

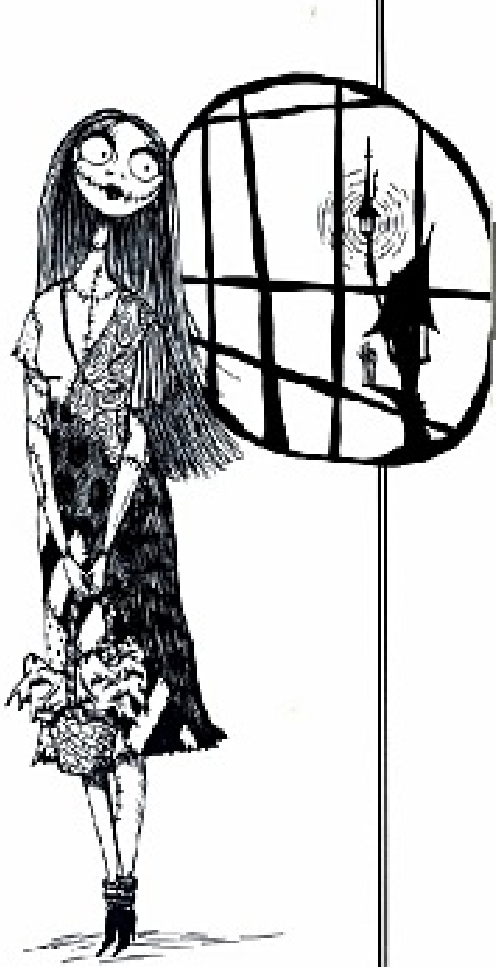
Thompson found her solution. As she describes it, "When I saw the way they animated her, that she moved like a spider, I was inspired to strengthen her character."

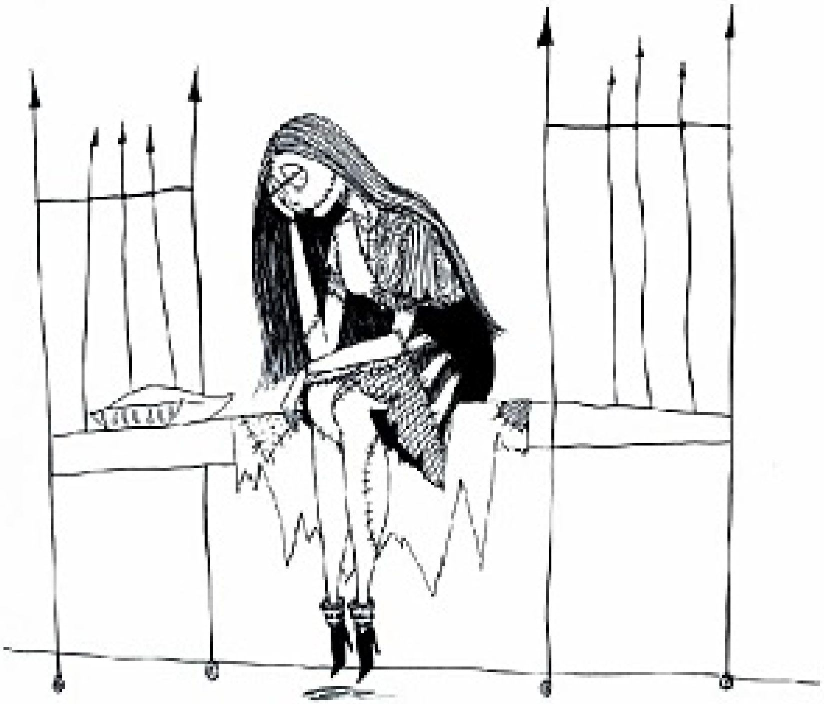
In the movie Sally is the creation of Dr. Finklestein, the Evil Scientist. Although he didn't do such a great job in finding matching parts when he built her, he at least—even if inadvertently—gave Sally more than the recommended daily requirement of spunk.

The Evil Scientist also gave each of Sally's limbs a life of its own. She can remove any part of her body, and it will remain active on its own—which can be very helpful.

When, for example, Dr. Finklestein attempts to restrain Sally by holding onto her arm, she simply unstitches it and runs away, leaving the arm behind to pummel the scientist on the head. While trying to rescue Santa Claus from the terrible tortures that the monstrous Oogie Boogie has in mind, Sally quickly detaches her hands, which clamber off to untie Santa's bonds.

"I love the idea that when she jumps out a window," says Thompson, "she can sew herself back together again."





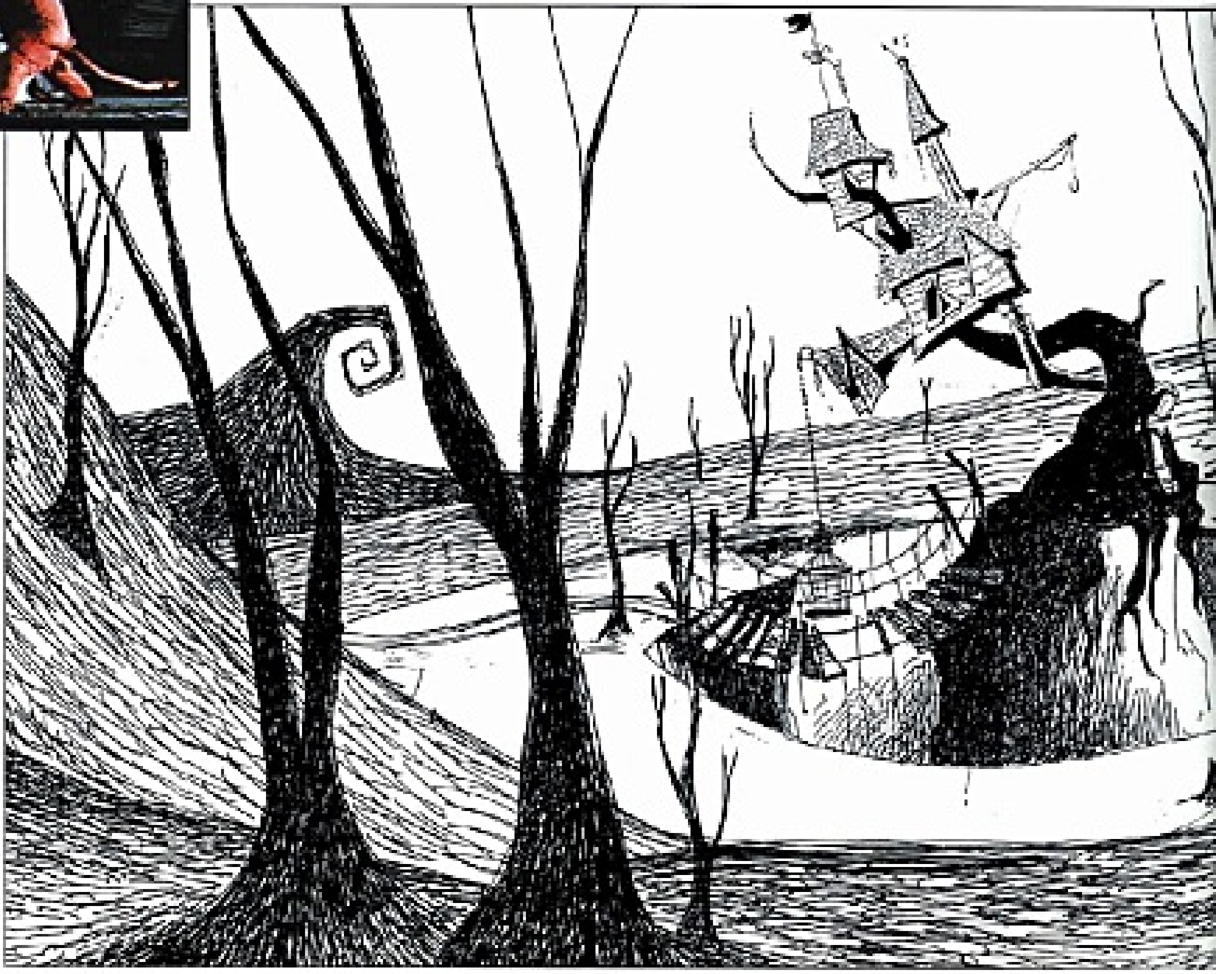
Thompson stresses that Sally "is Jack's truest friend, resourceful and brave. Only she understands what Jack is going through because she, too, dreams of something else from life. They are very much alike, but there is one crucial difference: while Jack's dilemma gives *Nightmare Before Christmas* its plot, Sally's gives it its heart."

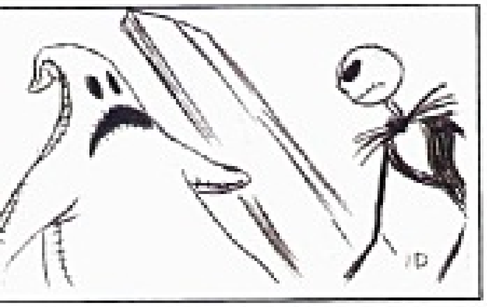
LOCK, SHOCK, AND BARREL
Kidnap the Sandy Claws
Throw him in a box
Bury him for ninety years
And then see if he talks.

SHOCK
Then Mr. Oogie Boogie Man
Can take the whole thing over then.
He'll be so pleased I do declare
That he will cook him rare . . .

LOCK, SHOCK, AND BARREL
Weeee!

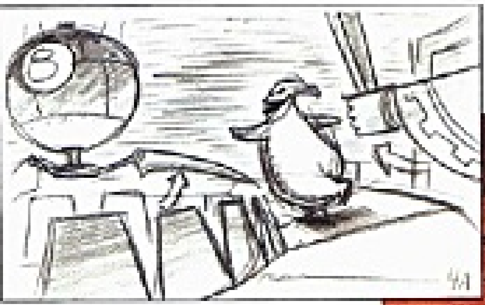
Lock, Shock, and Barrel live in a treehouse (below right). That's where they merrily plot just how to kidnap Sandy Claws (below).

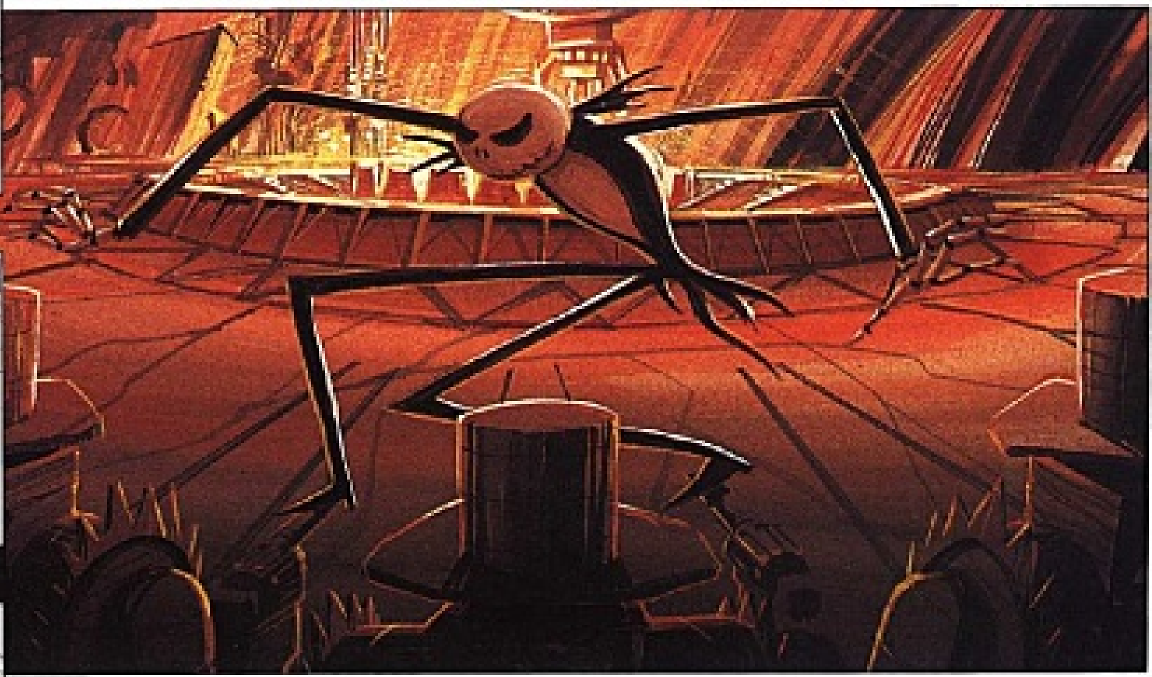


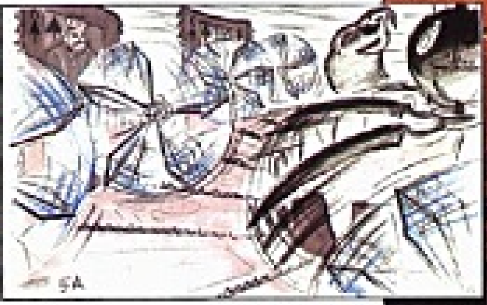


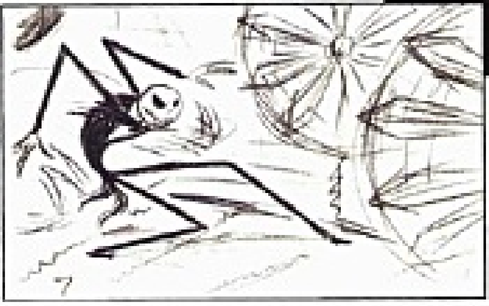
JACK ARRIVES IN OOGIE'S LAIR JUST BEFORE A HUGE BLADE SLICES THROUGH SALLY AND SANTA. A HAIR-RAISING BATTLE ENSUES. BUT OOGIE IS NO MATCH FOR JACK AND ENDS UP LITERALLY COMING UNRAVELED.

SANTA HURRIES OFF TO FIX CHRISTMAS, AND JACK—HOPING IT'S NOT TOO LATE—DEJECTEDLY WALKS HOME. THEN SNOW BEGINS TO FALL, BRINGING A SMILE TO JACK'S FACE. ALL AROUND HALLOWEENLAND CREATURES WONDER, "WHAT'S THIS?" ONLY SALLY IS SAD. SHE SITS ALONE IN THE CEMETERY, SINGING HER SONG. BUT THEN A SECOND VOICE JOINS HERS. IT IS JACK, ASKING HER TO SIT WITH HIM AND GAZE AT THE SKY.

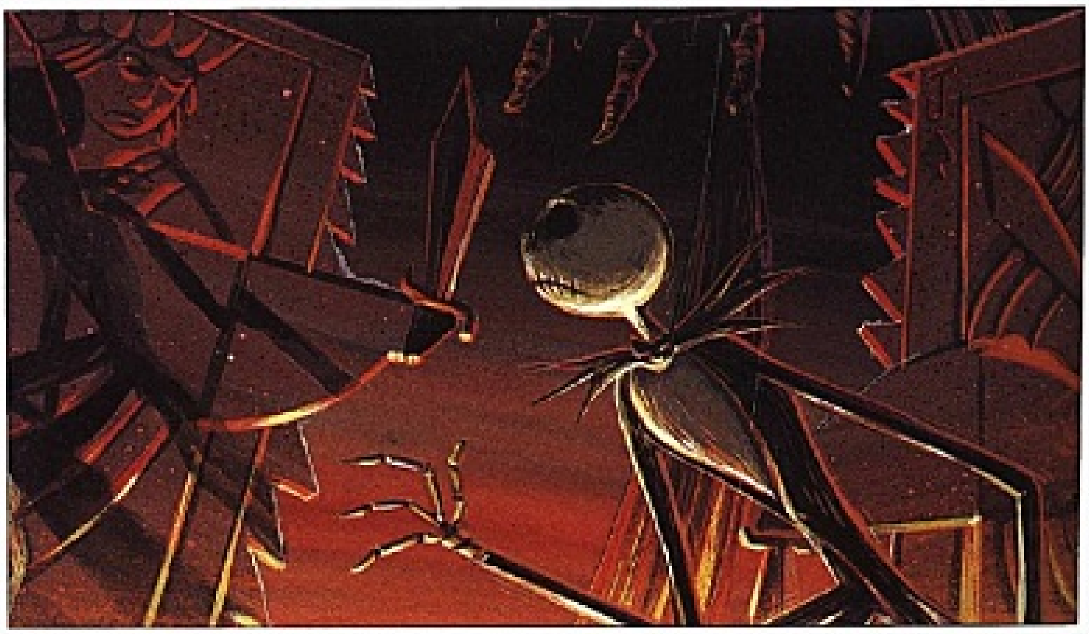


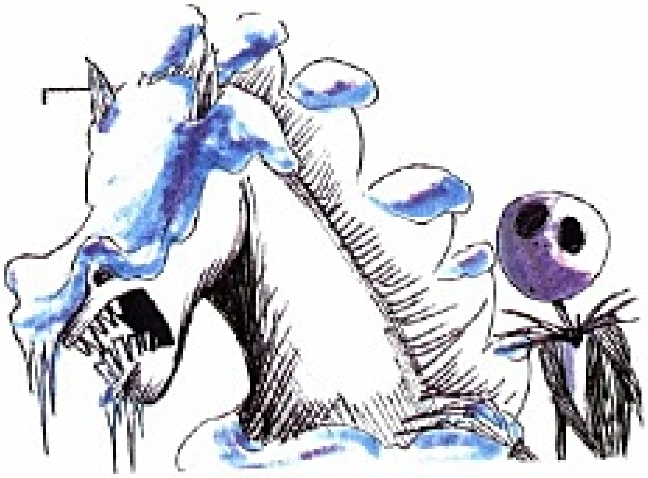


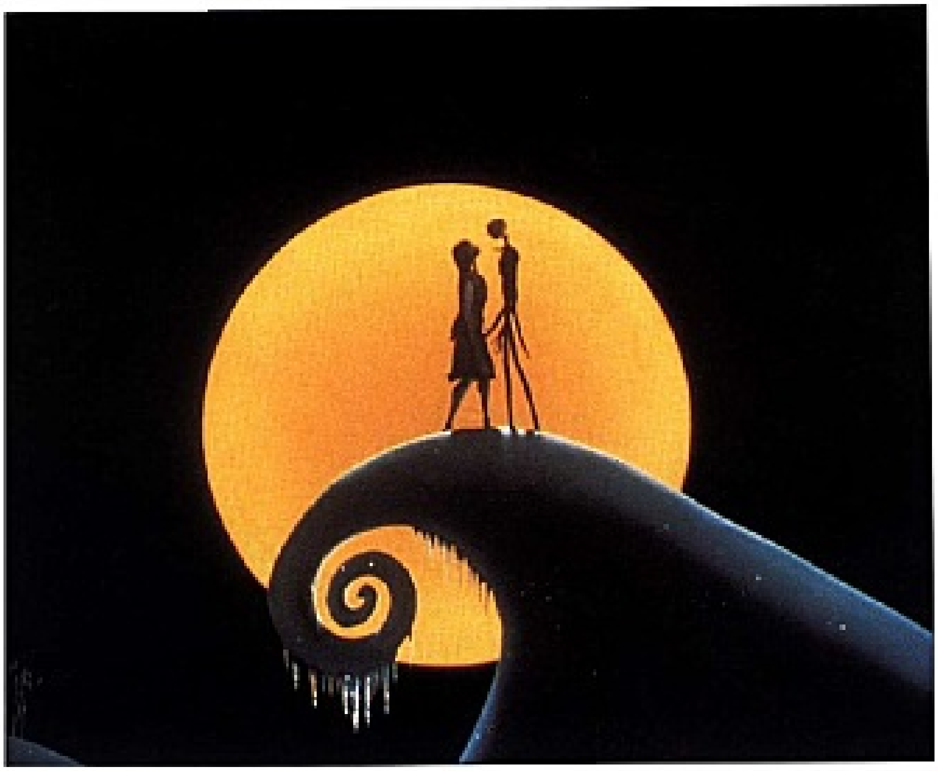


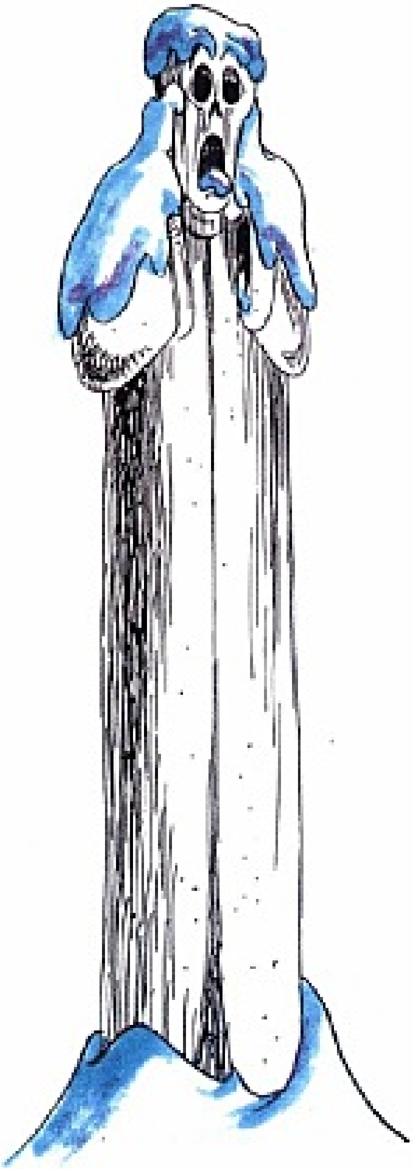


Although Oogie's surprised to see Jack (he thought Jack was dead), he laughingly sets off his chopping machines (in storyboard above). Jack, however, is enraged and leaps into the fray (in color keys at right).

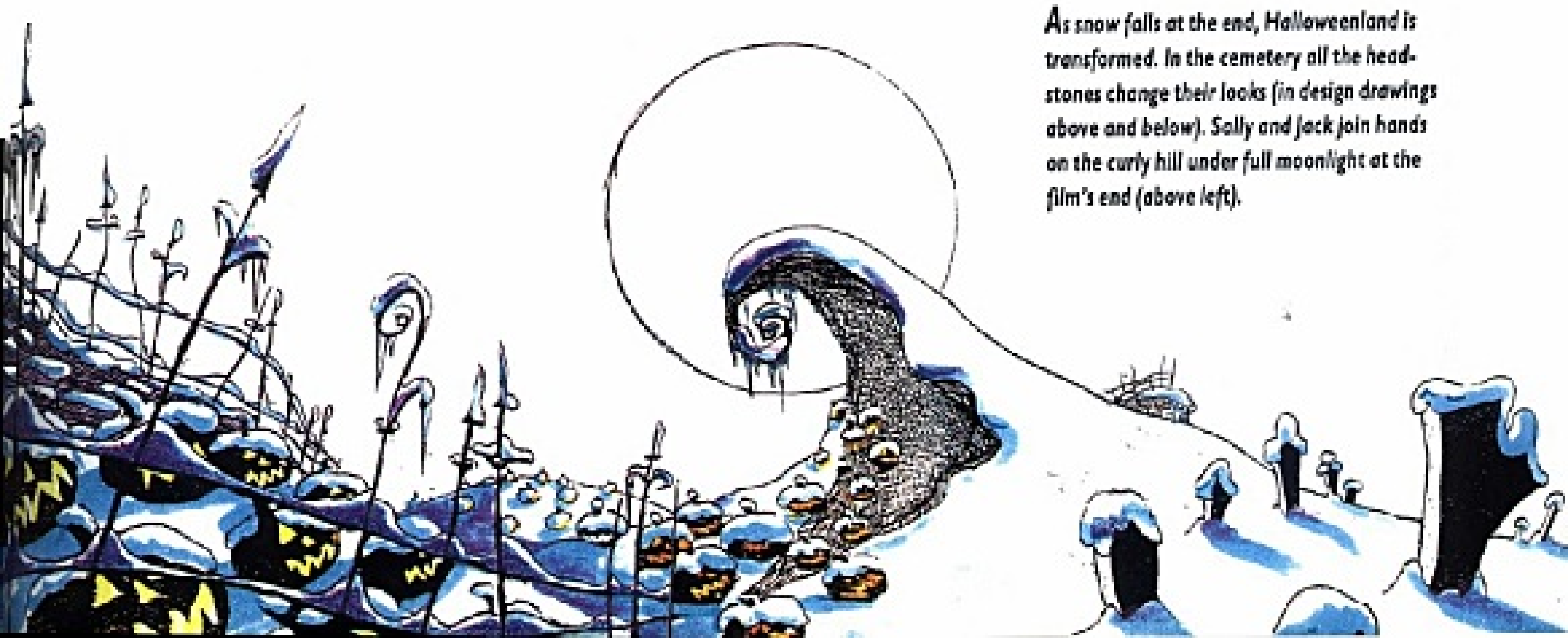




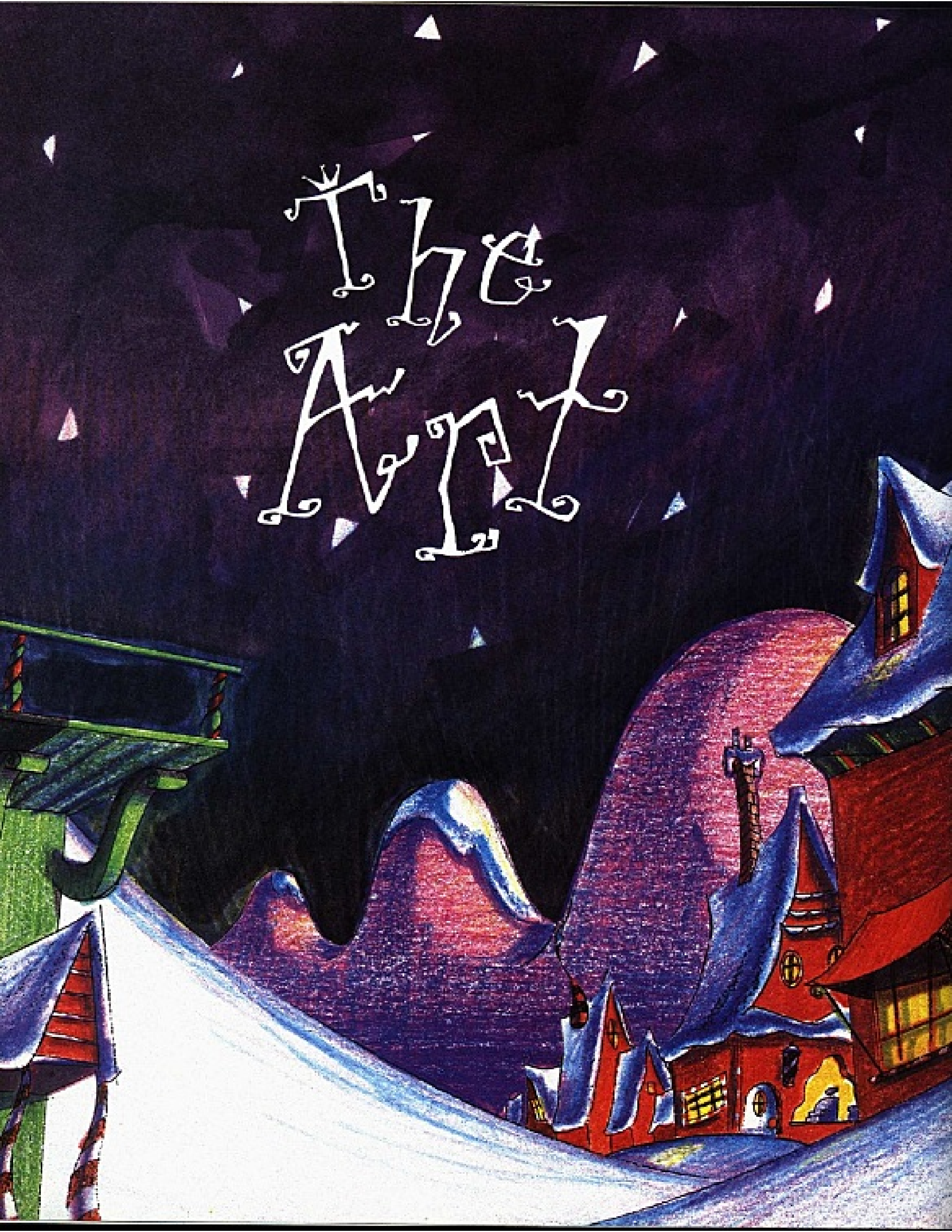


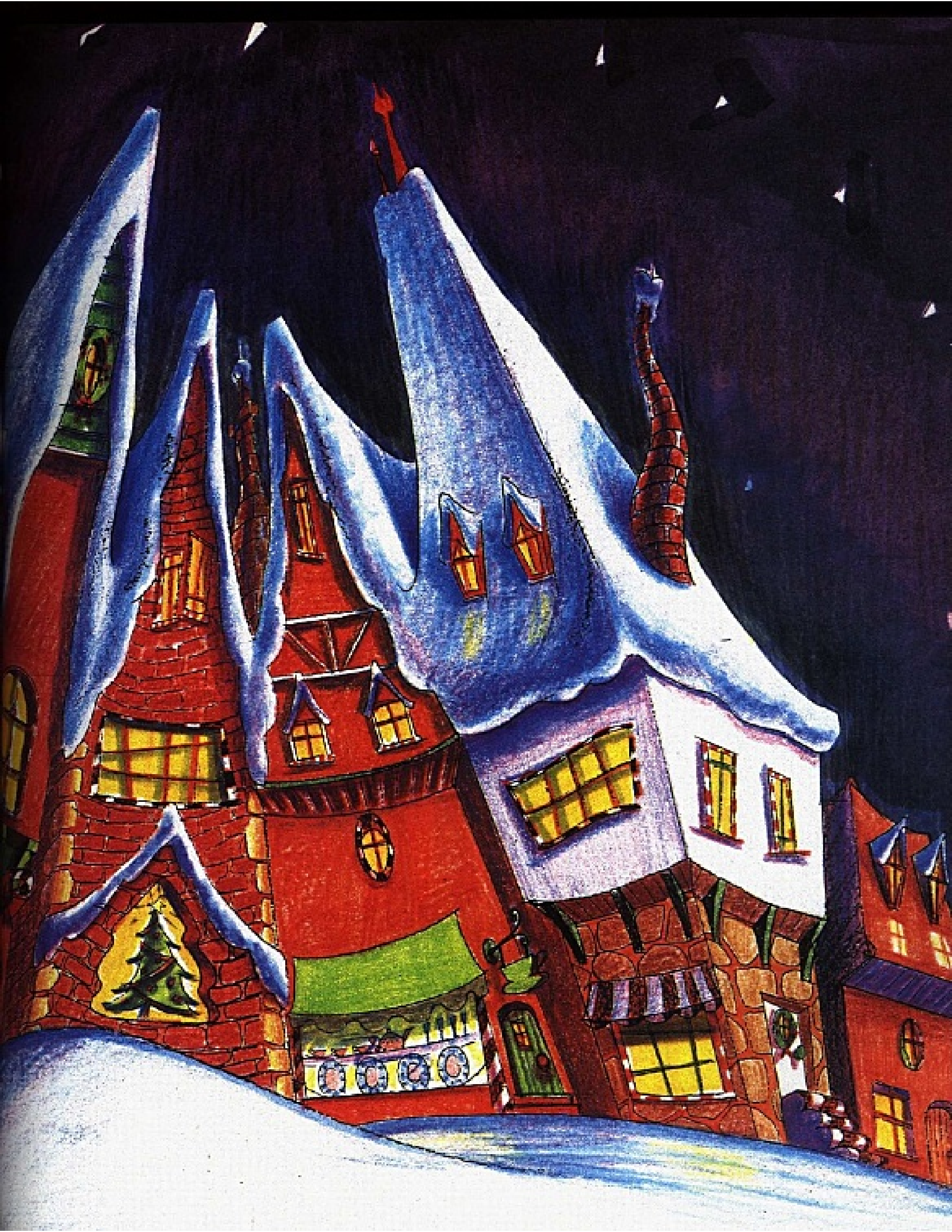


As snow falls at the end, Halloweenland is transformed. In the cemetery all the headstones change their looks (in design drawings above and below). Sally and Jack join hands on the curly hill under full moonlight at the film's end (above left).



The Art





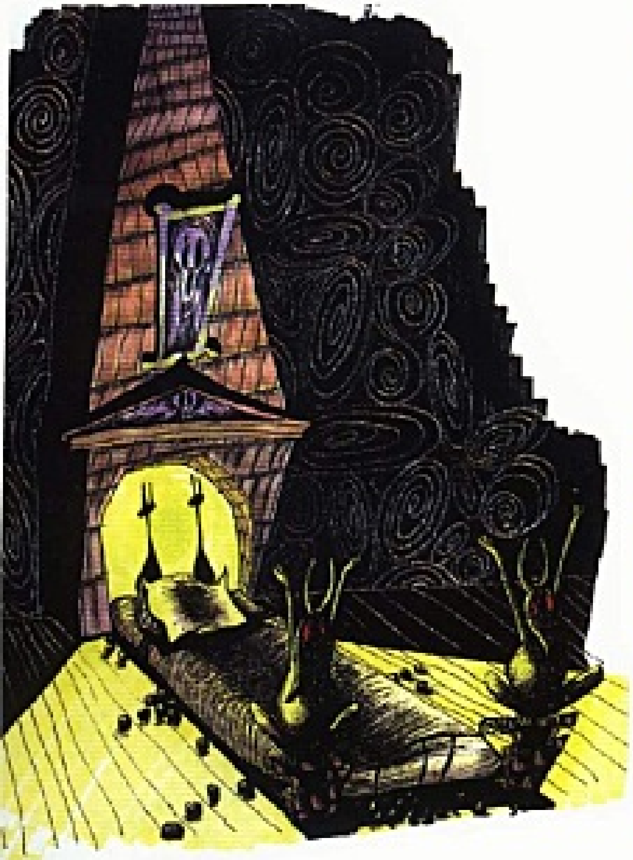
The Art

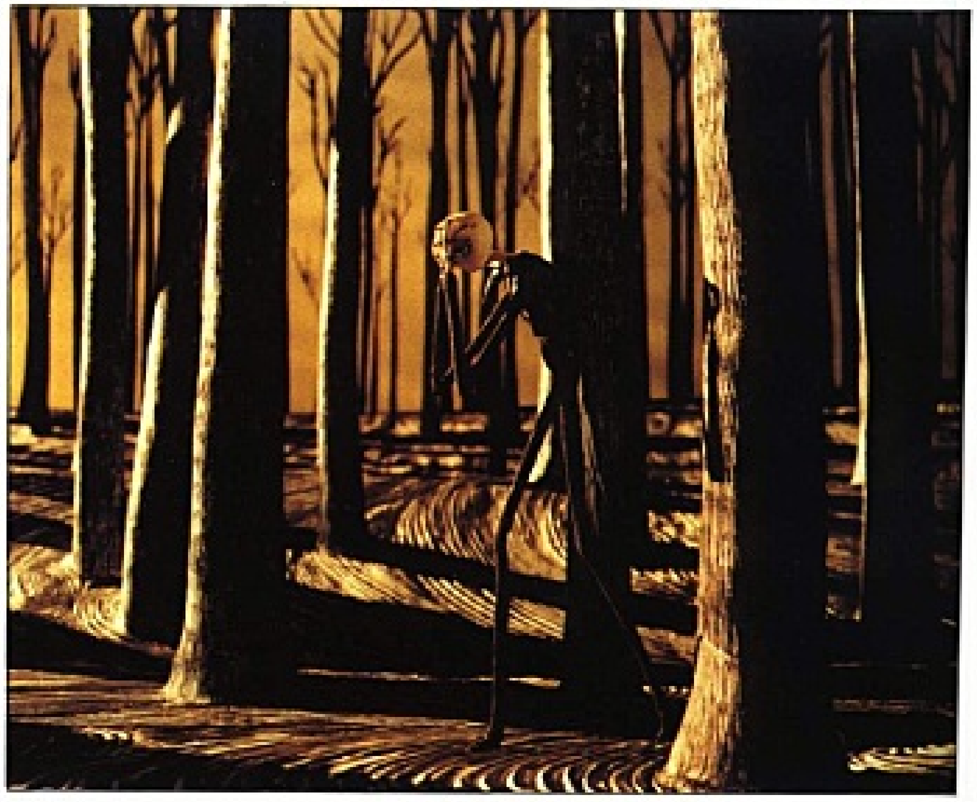
Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas is, in the truest sense of the word, unique. Disney Chairman Jeffrey Katzenberg claims, "In the eight years I've been at the studio, the only other movie that really set out to do something unlike anything done before was *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* I consider this to be a sister film."

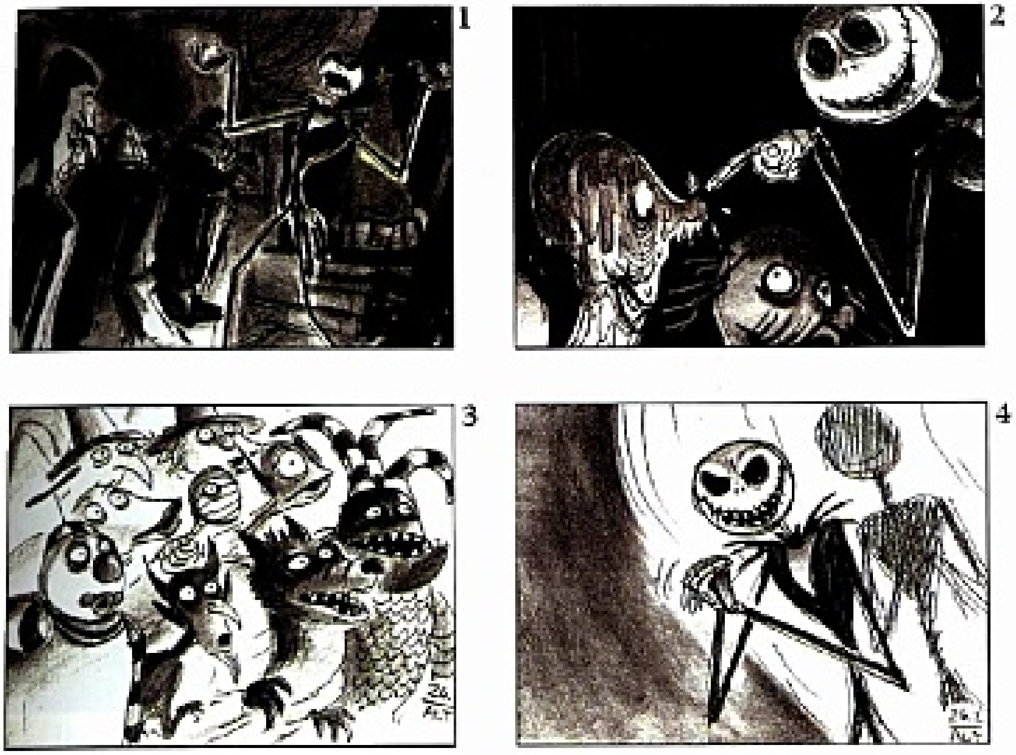
The story of Jack Skellington's ill-conceived plan to take over Christmas delights people of every age. The weird and colorful supporting characters—Sally, Oogie Boogie, Lock, Shock, Barrel, and the others—inspire screams of laughter, and sometimes just screams. But *Nightmare Before Christmas* is a rarity in that the way it was produced is every bit as fascinating as the film itself. For audiences accustomed to animated films, *Nightmare Before Christmas* offers surprises in both style and technique. The characters are fanciful yet solid, three-dimensional beings. They move through a world that seems genuine, but could not exist in "real" life.

Although the completed film seems as effortless as a dream, it took years to reach the screen, requiring almost unimaginably detailed—sometimes tedious, sometimes impossible—creative effort. This is the story of how *Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas* was made. It is told, to a great extent, in the words of the over 140 artists and technicians who brought the film to life.

The art of drawing is critical to Nightmare*. While jotting down his original poem, Tim Burton was already telling the story in his sketches (opposite). For the film, the art department's designs for props like Jack's bed (below) emphasized the graphic look Burton wanted. On screen, when Jack wanders through a forest (below right), the set has a three-dimensional presence and yet retains a drawn quality.*







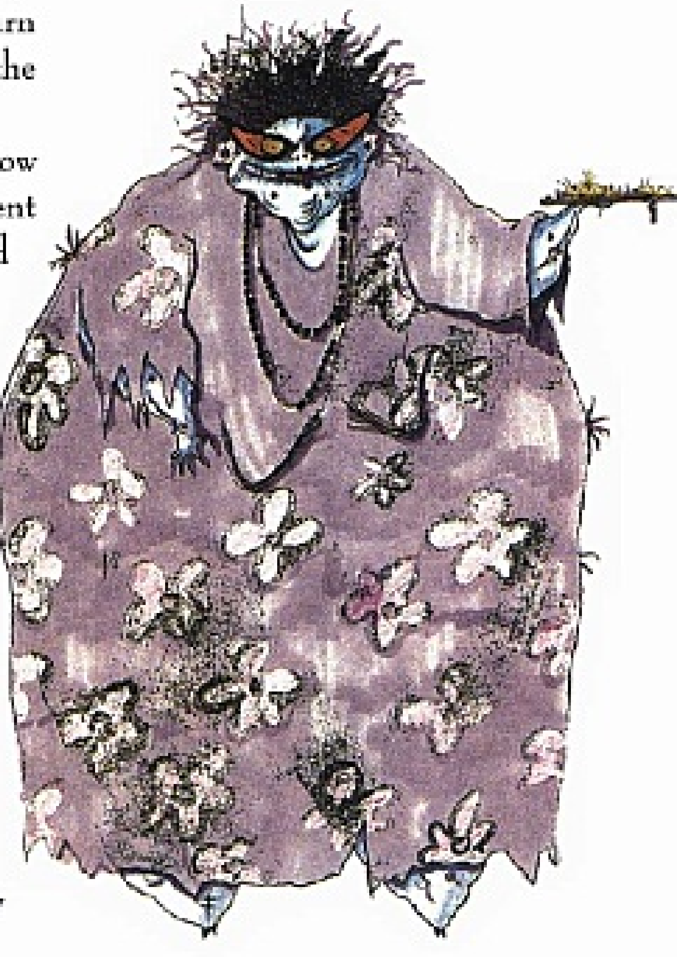
Using Elfman's lyrics as their initial script, the storyboard artists gave the songs a visual form. In the excerpts from "The Town Meeting Song" at left, for example, their images show just how Jack excites the crowd with his tale of Christmas Town's "fearsome king." One eager listener is the Corpse Mom (shown in the final color design below).

mas, it is difficult to separate one from the other. They grew out of each other in a complex process of collaboration. Burton's story ideas triggered responses in Elfman, who then wrote the songs. The songs in turn suggested new story points to Caroline Thompson, whose revision of the script led Burton to alter and expand the original story.

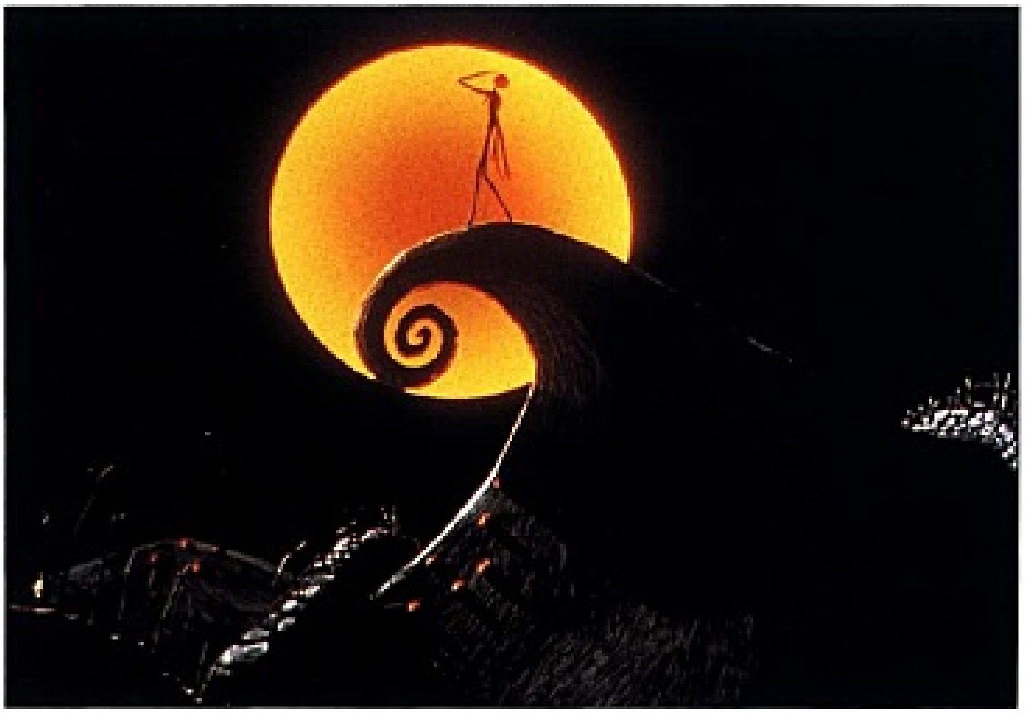
"There was a period of time when we were all trying to figure out how to get started," says Elfman. "None of us had done a musical. Tim sent me a whole series of color drawings of Jack Skellington, the sleigh, and the reindeer. The drawings really got me going."

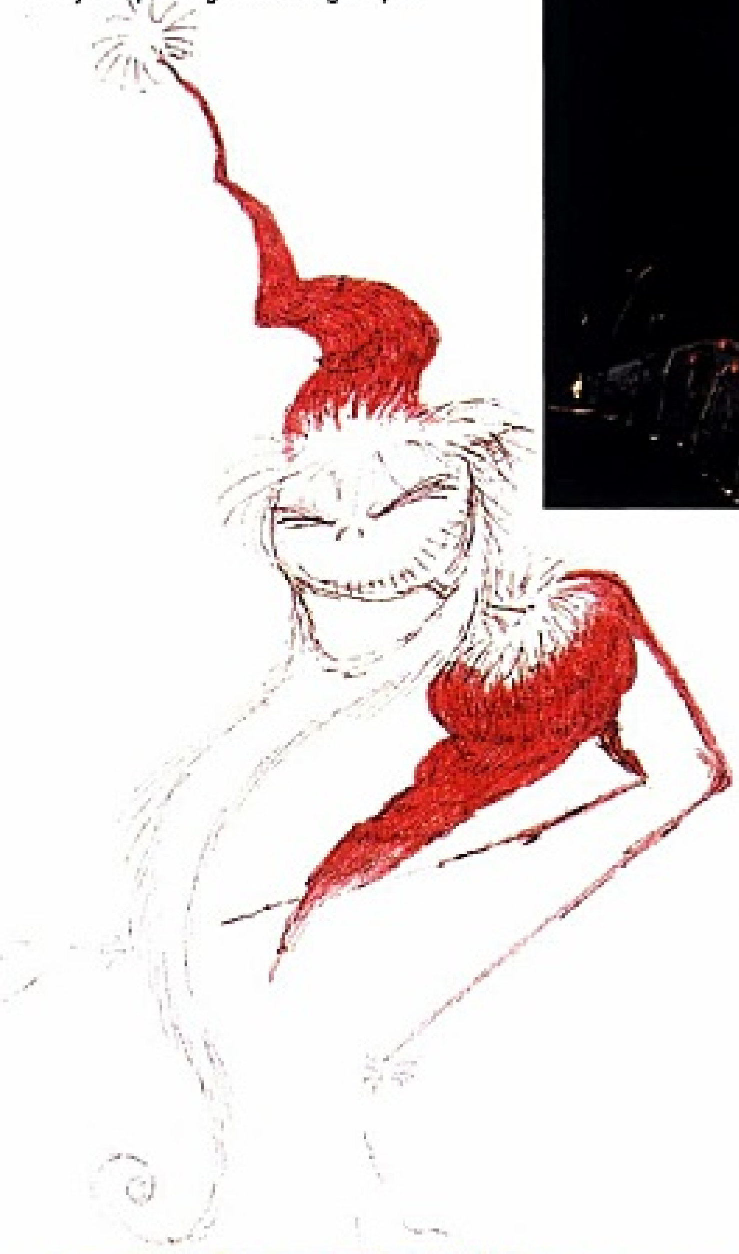
At this point there was no script; there wasn't even a completed story. Elfman and Burton began a series of meetings that Elfman feels, in retrospect, were an ideal way of working. Burton would visit Elfman, and they would discuss the story one scene at a time, talking about the tone and emotion. "As we were talking, I would begin to hear the music," Elfman recalls. "The instant Tim would leave I'd begin composing the song. Three days later, Tim would come over, I'd play him the song, and then we'd begin all over again on the next section."

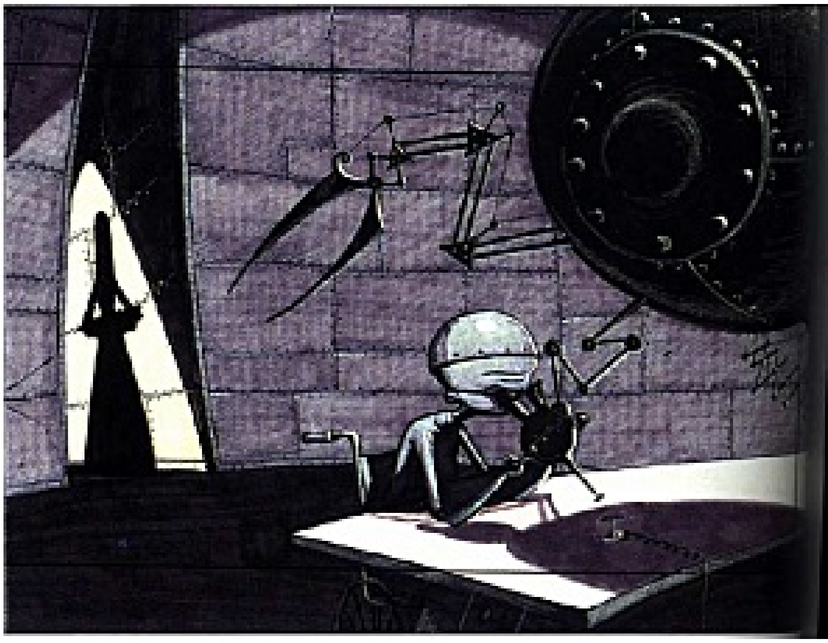
At their meetings Elfman felt like a kid at story time, waiting to hear the next installment. When Burton described Jack's discovery of Christmas Town, Elfman went off to write "What's This?" (see pages 36–41)—underlining Jack's joy at finding "this wonderful new

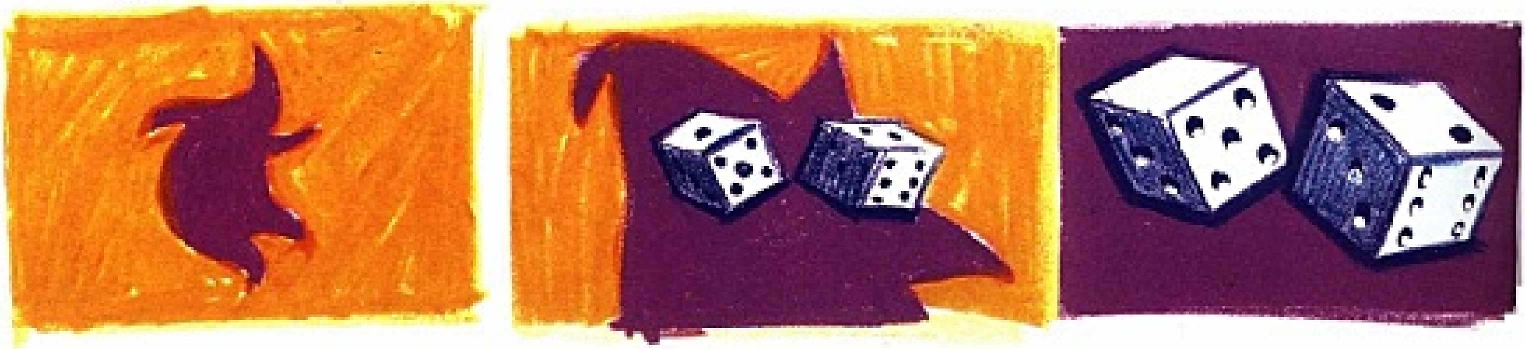


A *shot of Jack (right), Burton's drawing (below), a rendering of the Evil Scientist's lab (below right), a color key for Oogie's dance (bottom), and the Sally puppet (opposite) are just a few stages in making the film.*









place." Then, at their next meeting, Elfman asked, "Now what happens?" Burton replied, "Well, Jack has to describe Christmas to Halloween Town." Then Elfman exclaimed, "Wait, I have a great idea for that!" And he hurried off to write "The Town Meeting Song" (pages 42–47).

"I wouldn't think past the next area of the story," Elfman recalls. "Sometimes I'd have to say to Tim, 'Please get out! I can hear the music and I have to get it down before I forget it.' What I'd get out of our conversations would carry right into the song. It was really fun. Before we knew it we had ten songs, and those ten songs told quite a bit of the story."

"Originally, Tim and Michael McDowell [the initial screenwriter] were going to write the lyrics and give Danny suggestions," says Caroline Thompson. She laughs. "By the third song he was so far ahead of them, they just said, 'Do it!'"

Elfman's songs helped some characters express themselves and established the personalities of others. While Burton created the character of Jack Skellington in his original poem, Elfman helped round out Jack's personality in songs like "Jack's Lament" (see pages 30–32).

Elfman took Burton's suggestion of the villainous Oogie Boogie and defined him through his song (performed by gravel-voiced Ken Page). Oogie Boogie's musical number (see pages 66–71) recalls the wonderful moments in Max and Dave Fleischer's Betty Boop cartoons of the thirties when Cab Calloway would wail a nasty blues tune like "Minnie the Moocher." Oogie even performs a slinky Callowayesque dance—not too easy when you're a huge burlap creature filled with crawling bugs.

The impish trick-or-treaters Lock, Shock, and Barrel also have their own song. So does Sally—although her song was written rather late in the composing process, after Caroline Thompson had been brought in to write the script. "Sally was a character that Danny took my lead on rather than the other way around," Thompson points out.

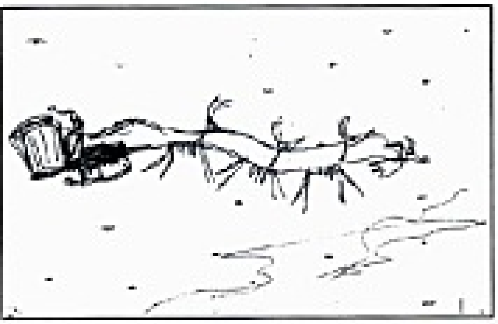
Not only do Elfman's songs help define the characters, but also no major plot point occurs without the accompaniment of music. In the strange lands of *Nightmare Before Christmas*, as in the sunnier Technicolor worlds of Hollywood's great musicals, the characters communicate to each other and to us through song.

SCRIPT

An initial, uncompleted version of the script for *Nightmare Before Christmas* was written by Michael McDowell, who had previously worked with Tim Burton on the ingenious, hilariously macabre *Beetlejuice* (1988). "The original draft had some good ideas," Selick says, "but it was not completely successful. We actually started the movie without a screenplay." Fortunately, Danny Elfman had already written the lyrics for the songs. As Selick explains, "The songs had a lot of storytelling within them so we tackled them first. We figured we could rework material later around the songs."

Caroline Thompson was brought in after storyboarding had begun. "When I came in," she says, "Danny Elfman's songs were about eighty percent written. My objective was to write a story to thread all these songs together. To fill out characters who weren't otherwise filled out."

"I never even saw the original script," she recalls. "They just gave me Danny's lyrics. I remember saying to Tim, 'Just let me take it away for a week and I'll see what I can bring back.' So I went up north for a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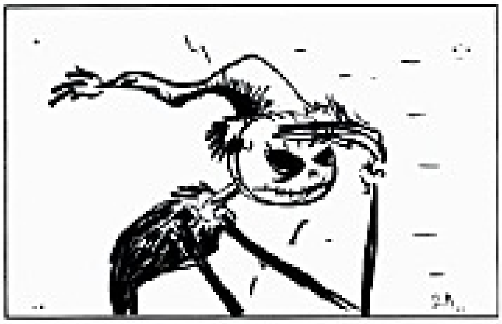
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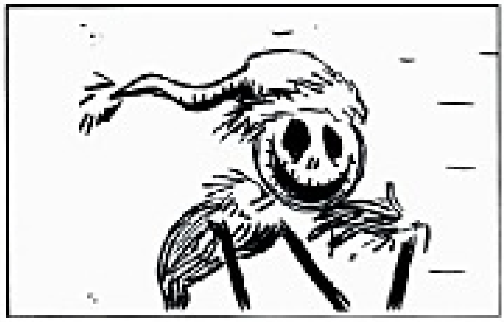
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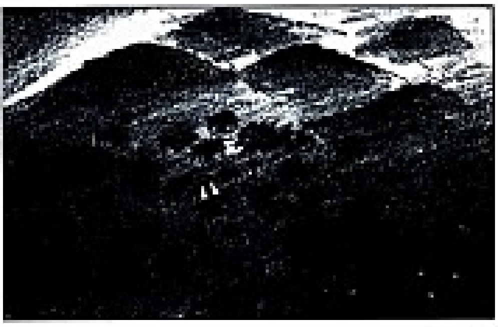
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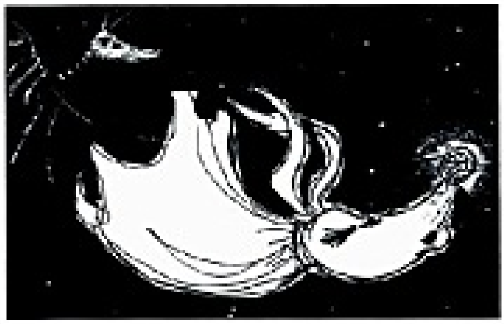
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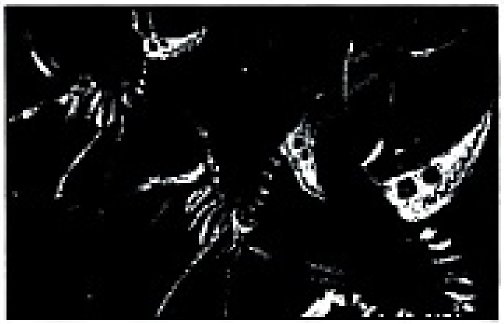
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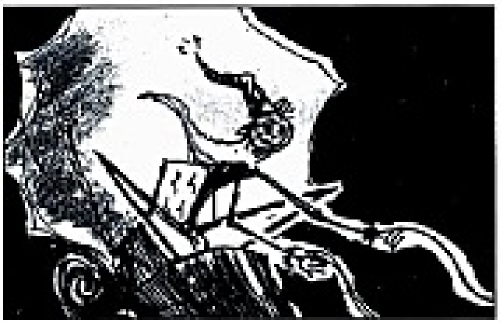
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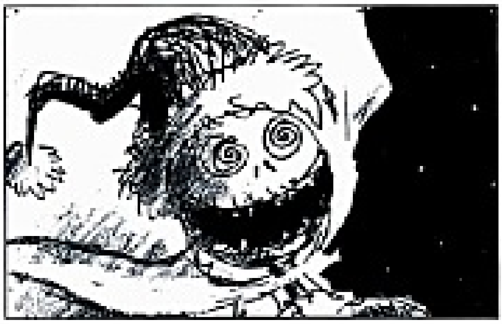
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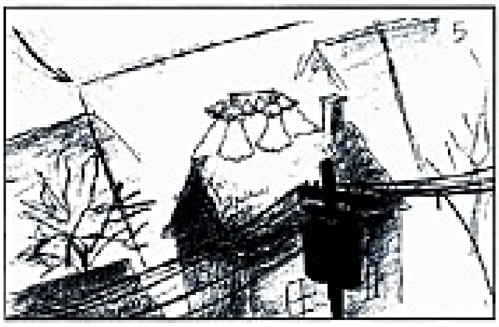
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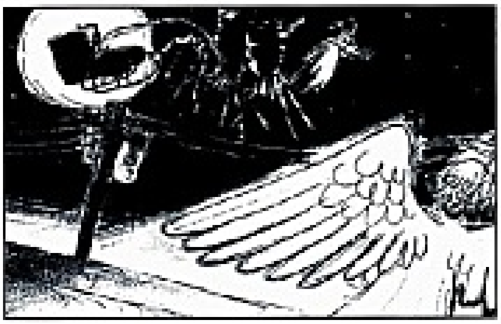
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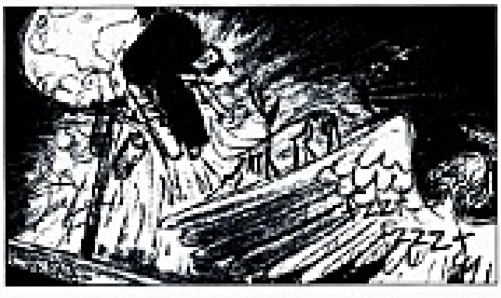
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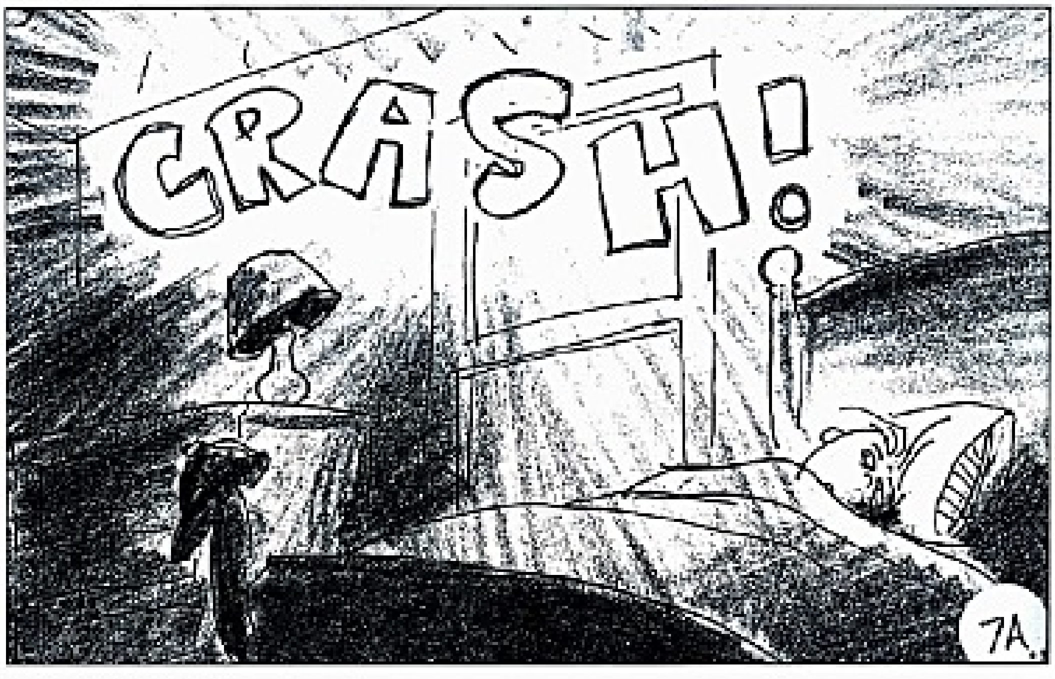
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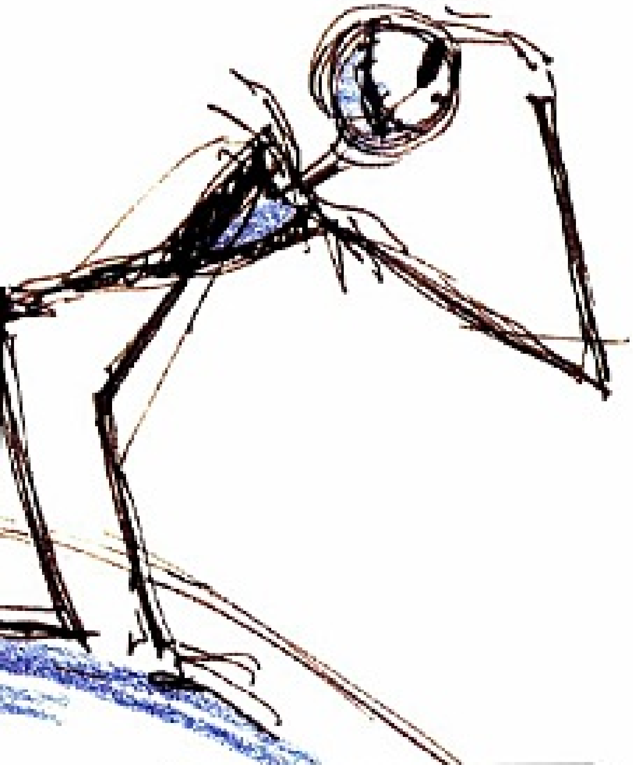

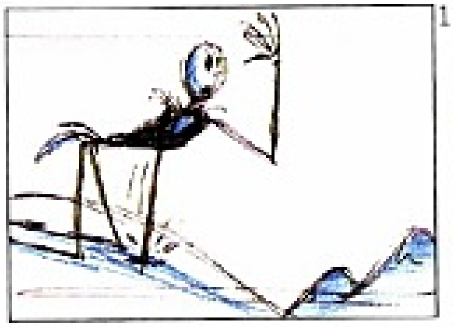

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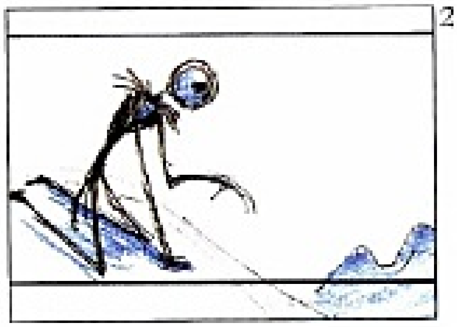

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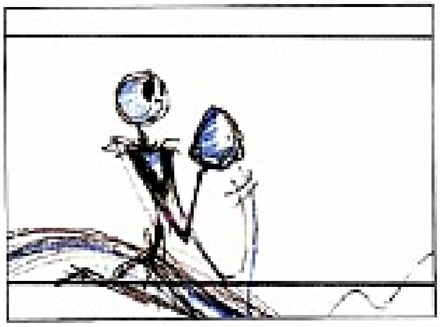

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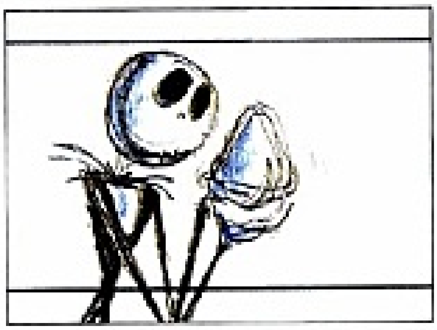

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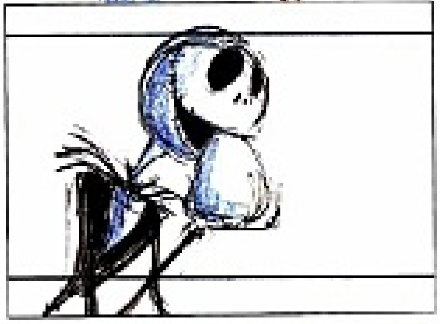

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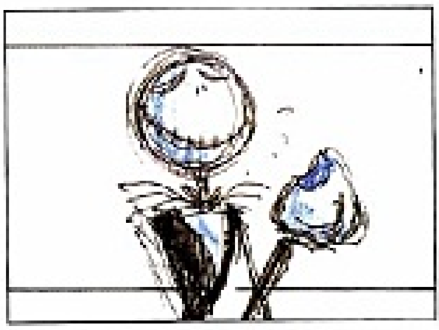

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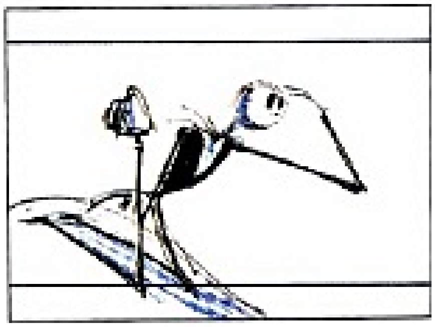

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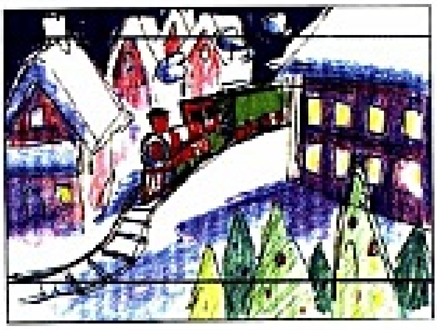

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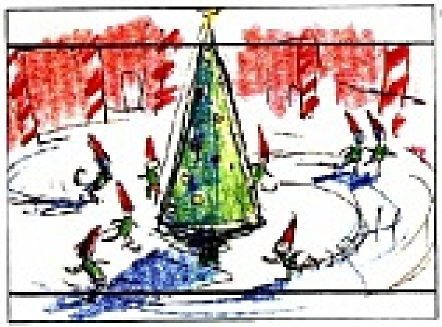

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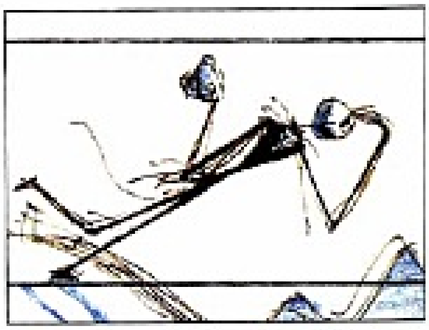

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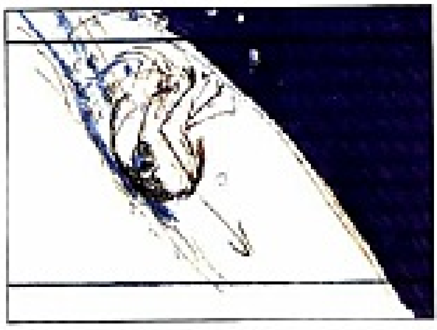

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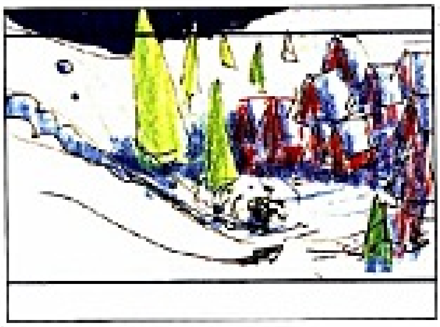

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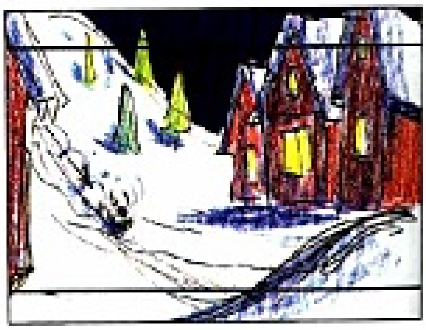

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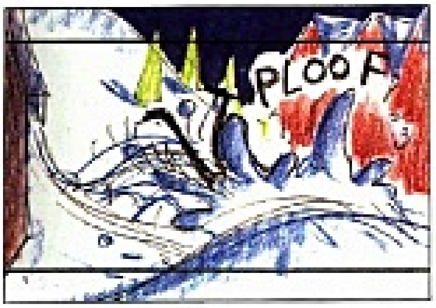
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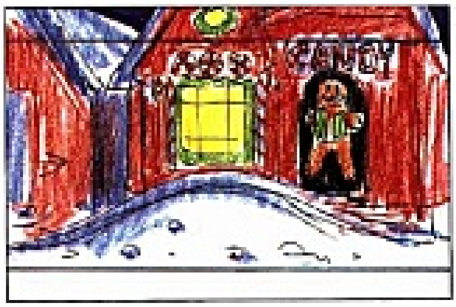
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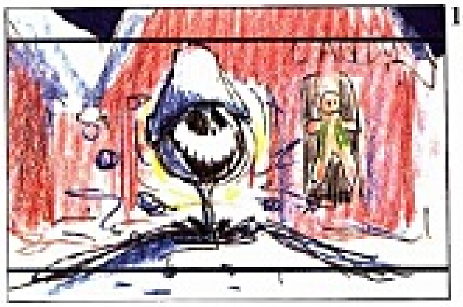
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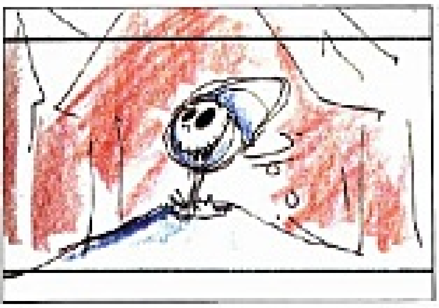
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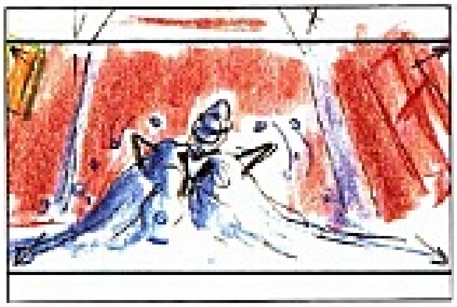
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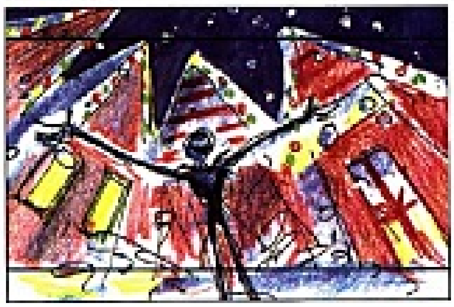
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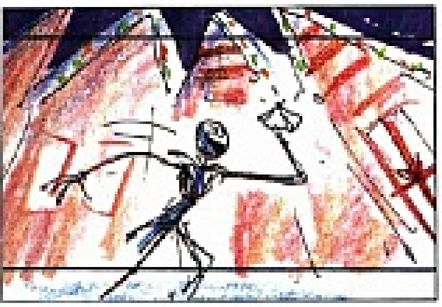
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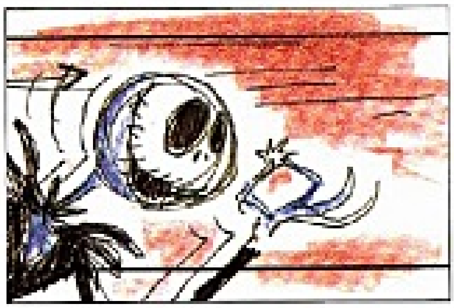
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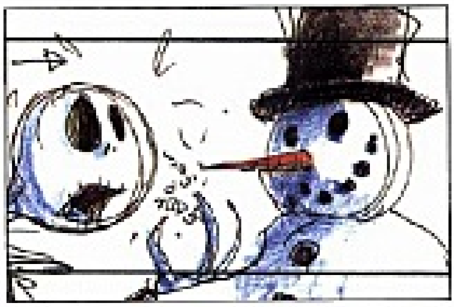
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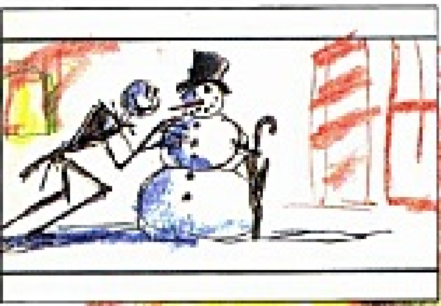
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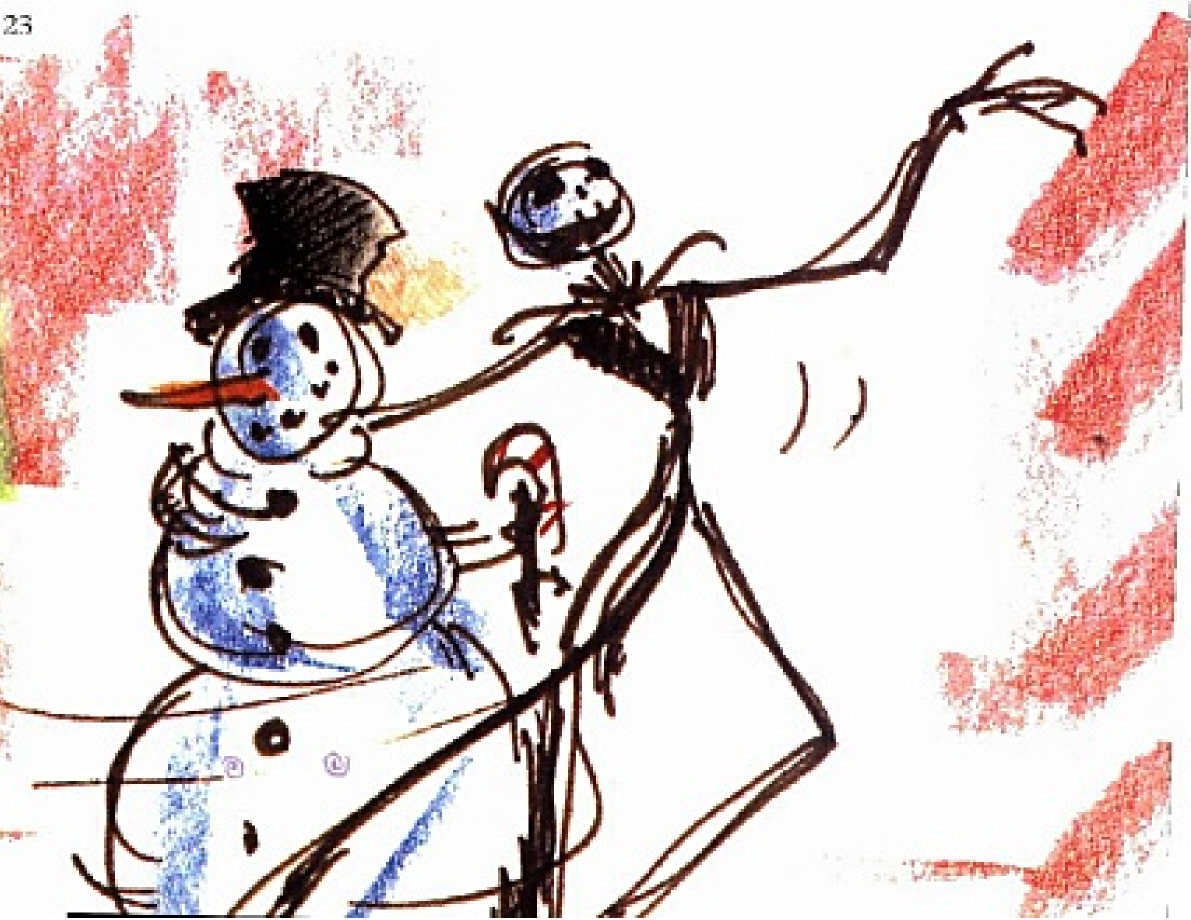
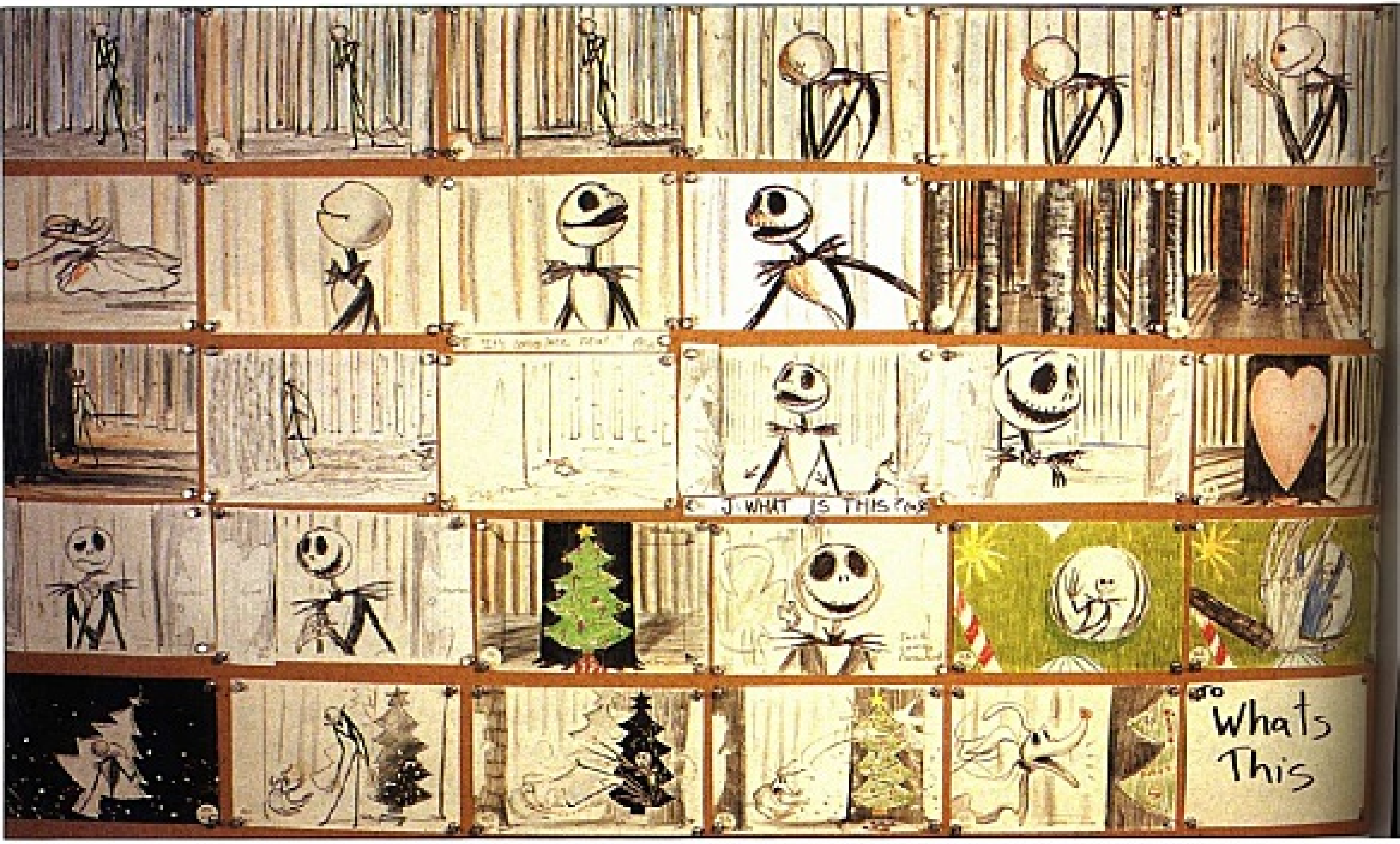


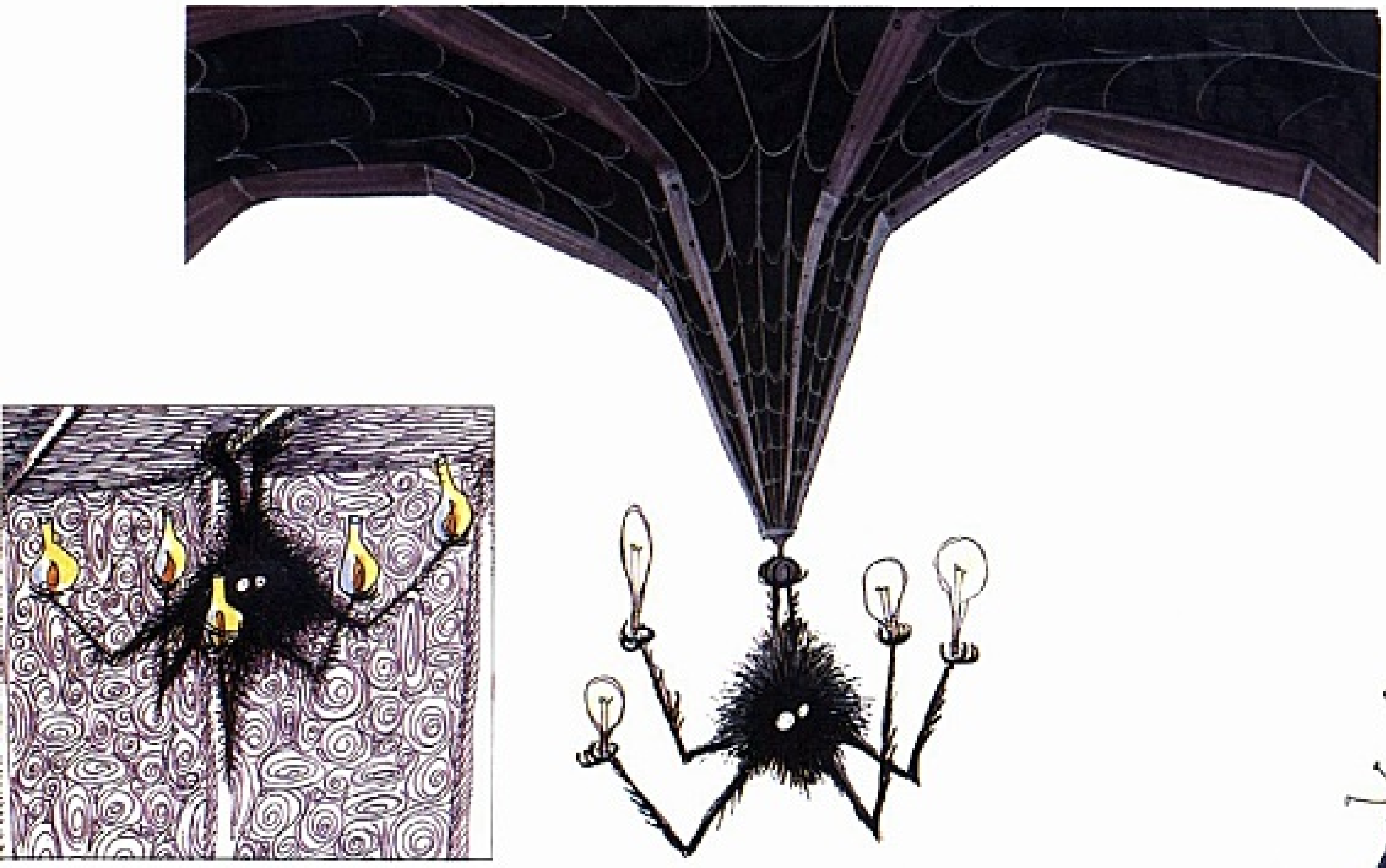
artist simply paints a background. But in this kind of animation, the crew has to physically build the set under a tight deadline.

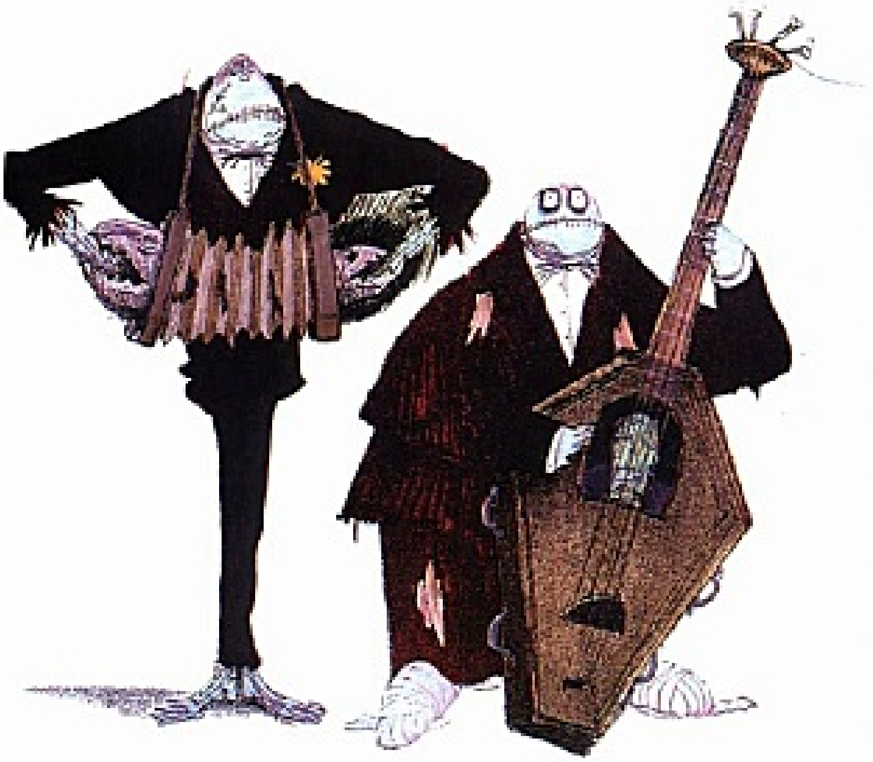
Overall, the storyboard artists have tremendous input into the way different sequences develop. But the director still has the final say. "It's his vision, incorporating our ideas," Cachuela notes. "We give him a variety of things to choose from, although every once in a while there's something that has to be really specific about character relationships or action in a scene. The storyboard department is basically Henry Selick's drawing hand."

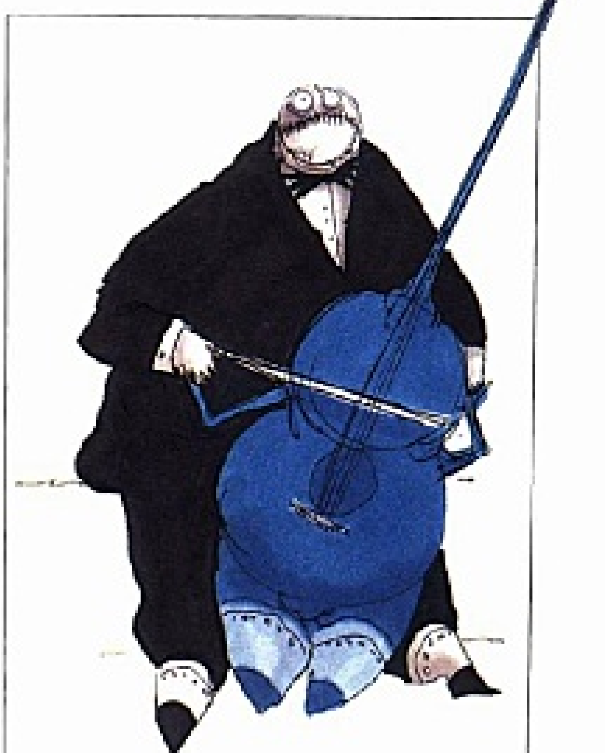
Once the storyboard is complete, it is photographed by a movie camera, creating a "story reel." Each storyboard shot is edited to run the same length as the final shot in the film. The story reel is synched up to a temporary dialogue soundtrack and gradually transformed into a real movie. As each scene is animated, it is cut into the story reel in place of the sketches. Thus the filmmakers always have a reasonable facsimile of their movie—a kind of Frankenstein monster, part storyboard art, part completed animation. As Selick puts it, "You kind of make the film twice."

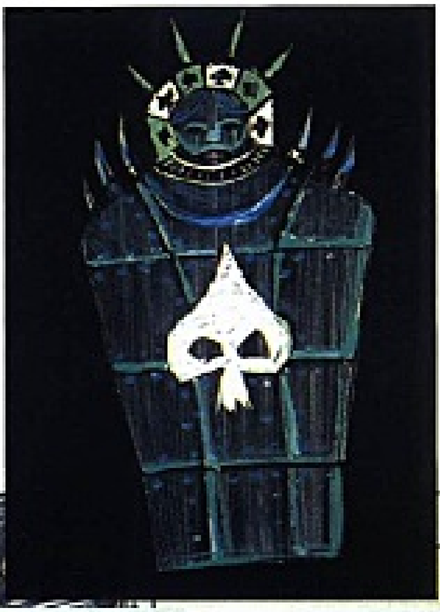
In preparing storyboards for scenes like the one below (where Jack discovers the holiday doors) or opposite (where Lock, Shock, and Barrel appear at Santa's door), the artists do much more than simply draw a picture. "We're really writing with our drawings," explains Jorgen Klubien. The panels not only tell the story, but give information about staging, props, and camera angles.

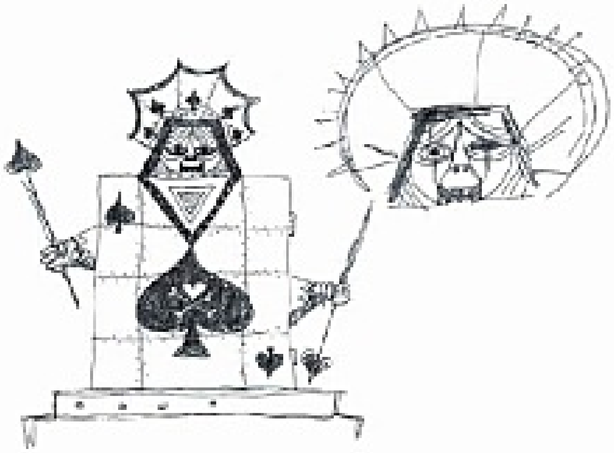


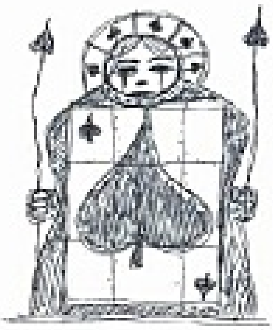


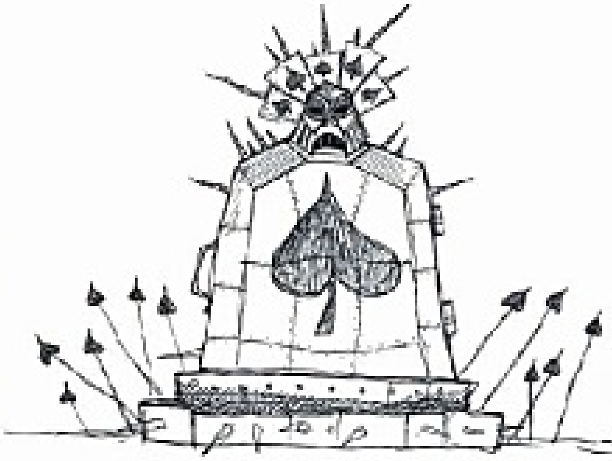


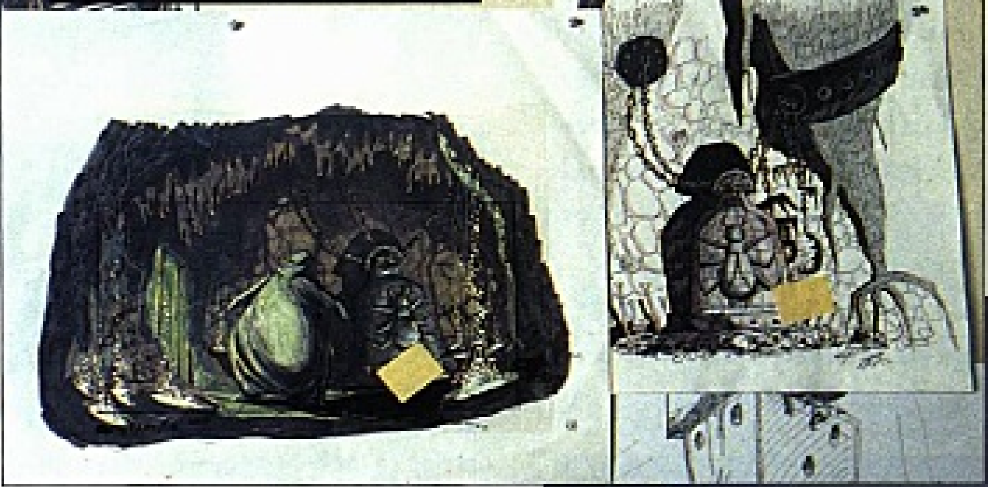


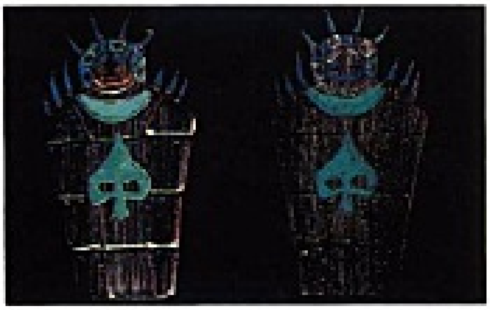


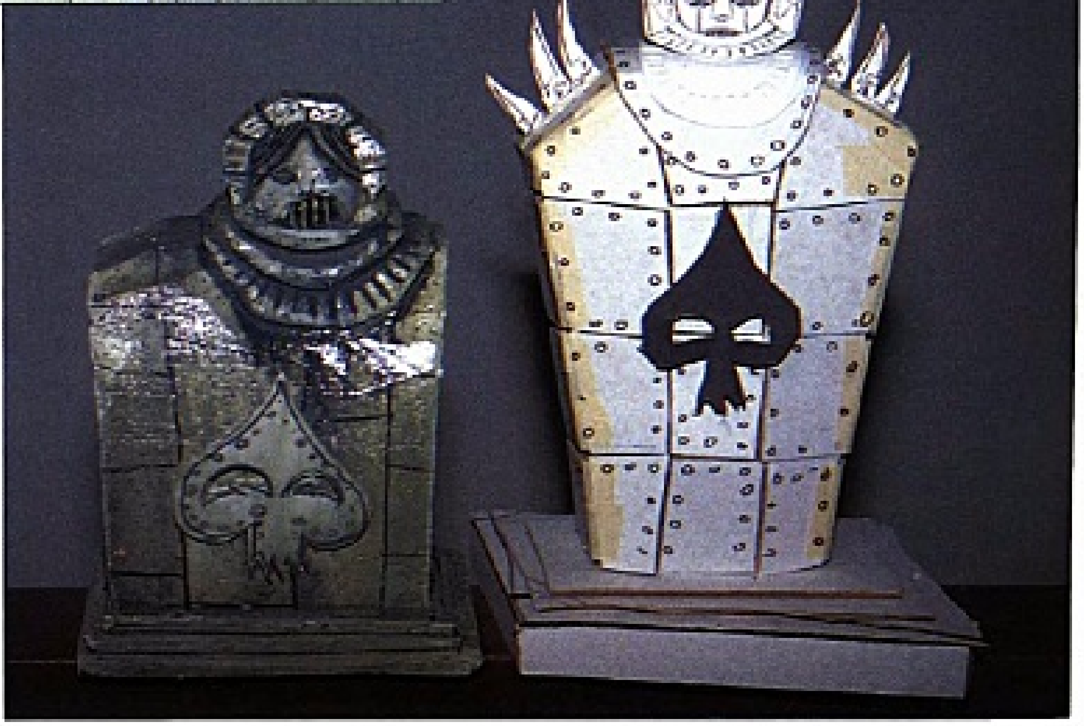




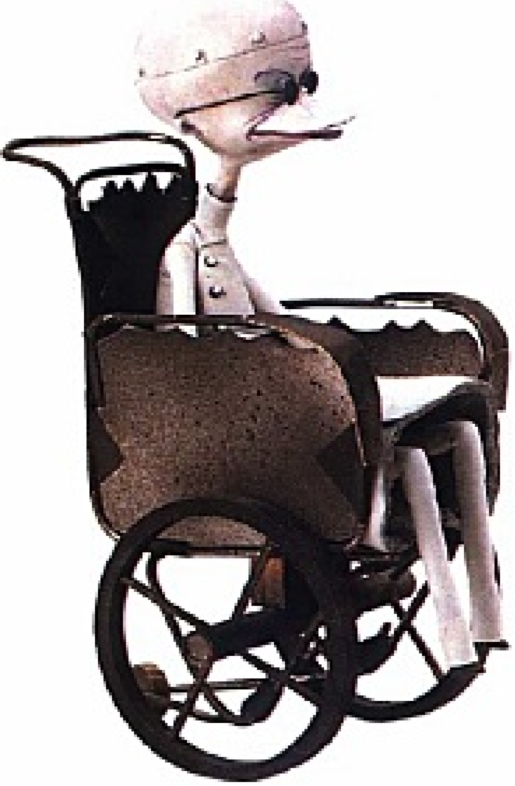


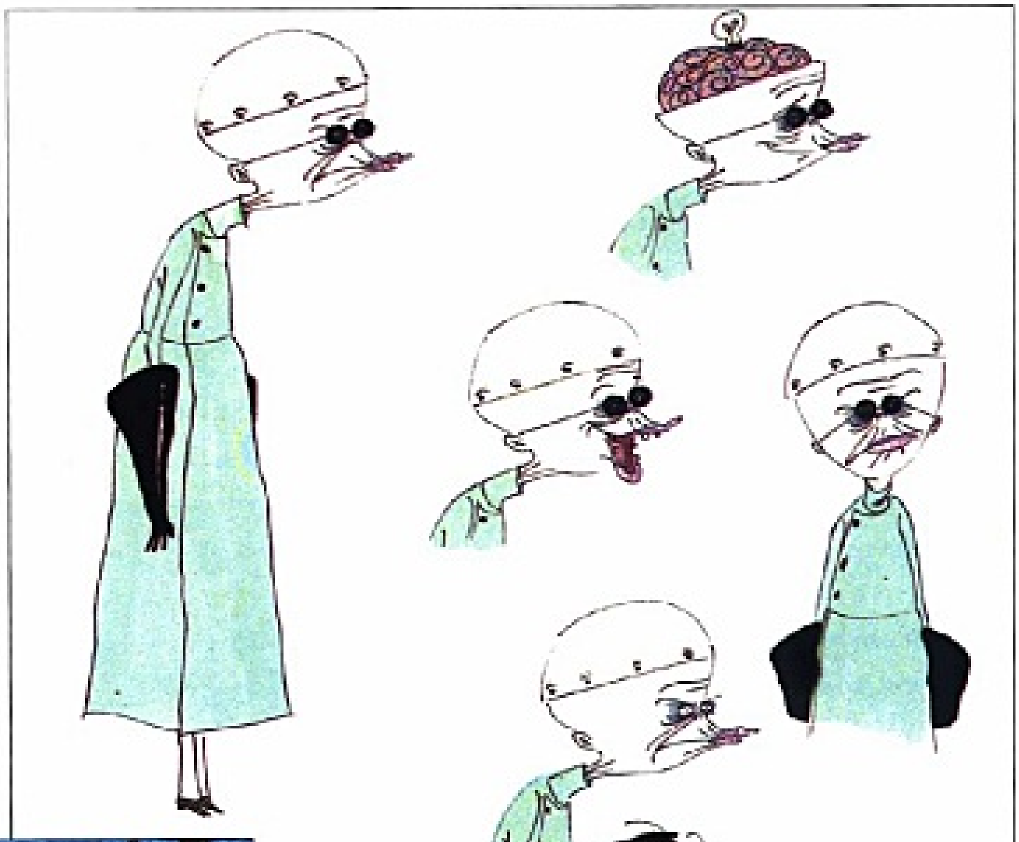


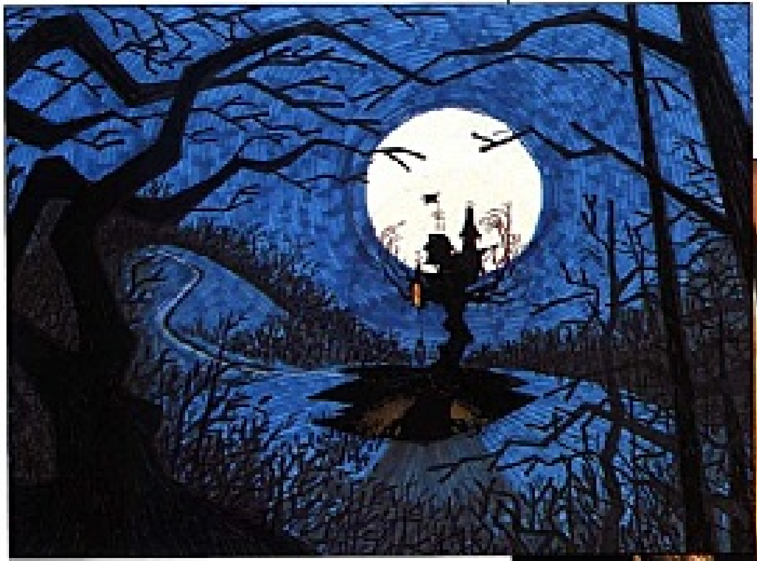


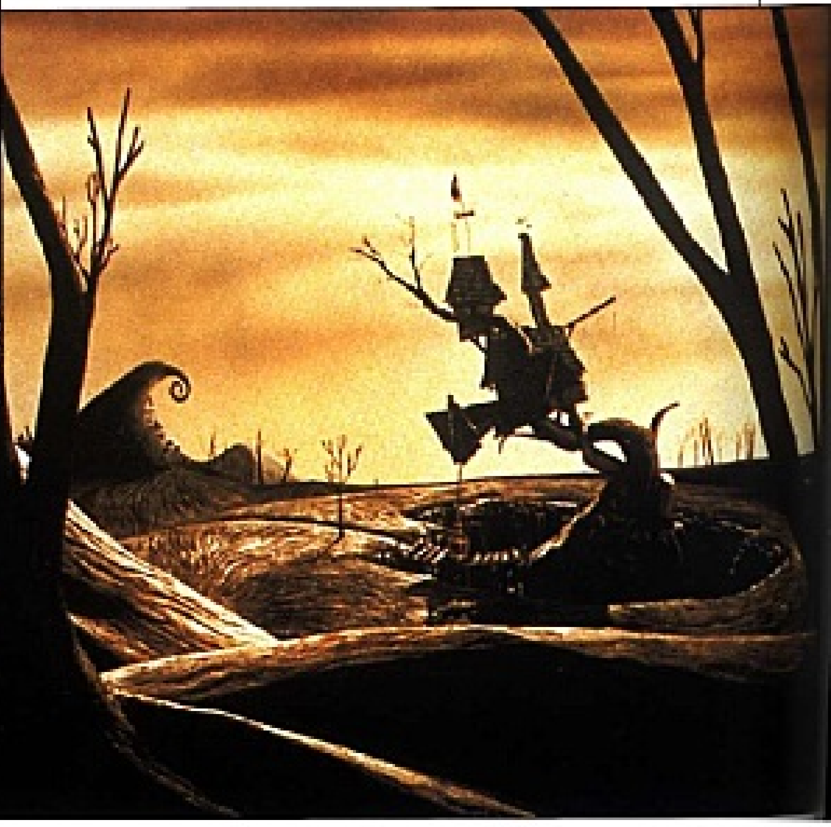


***The** Iron Maiden, one of many threatening props in Oogie's lair, went through many transformations, from initial concept drawings (top right), to more detailed preliminary sketches (middle left), to color studies (above) and three-dimensional mockups (right)—before reaching her final form (see pages 67 and 71).*

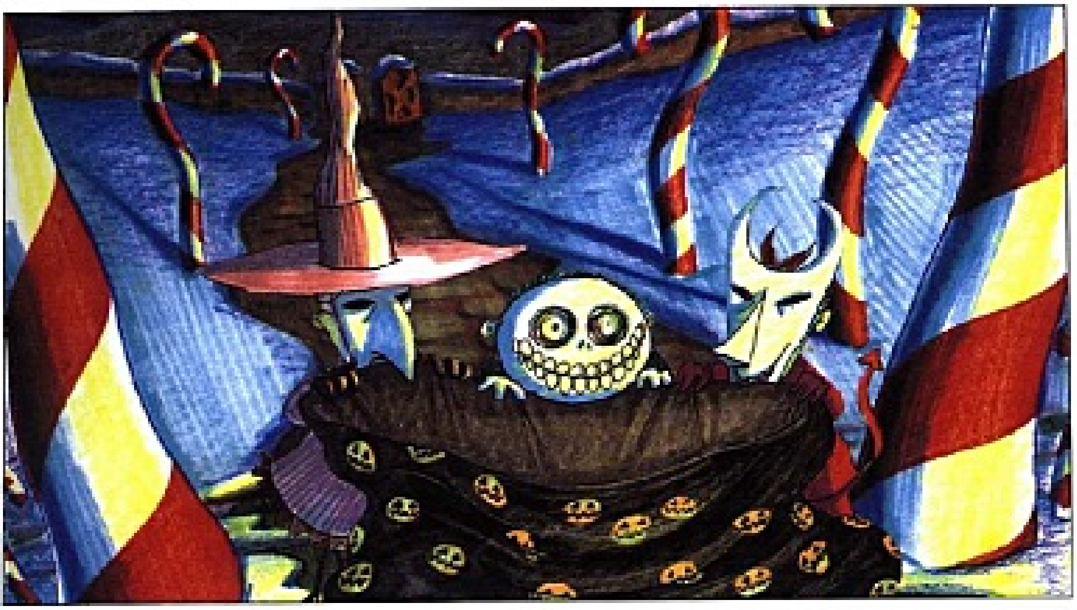




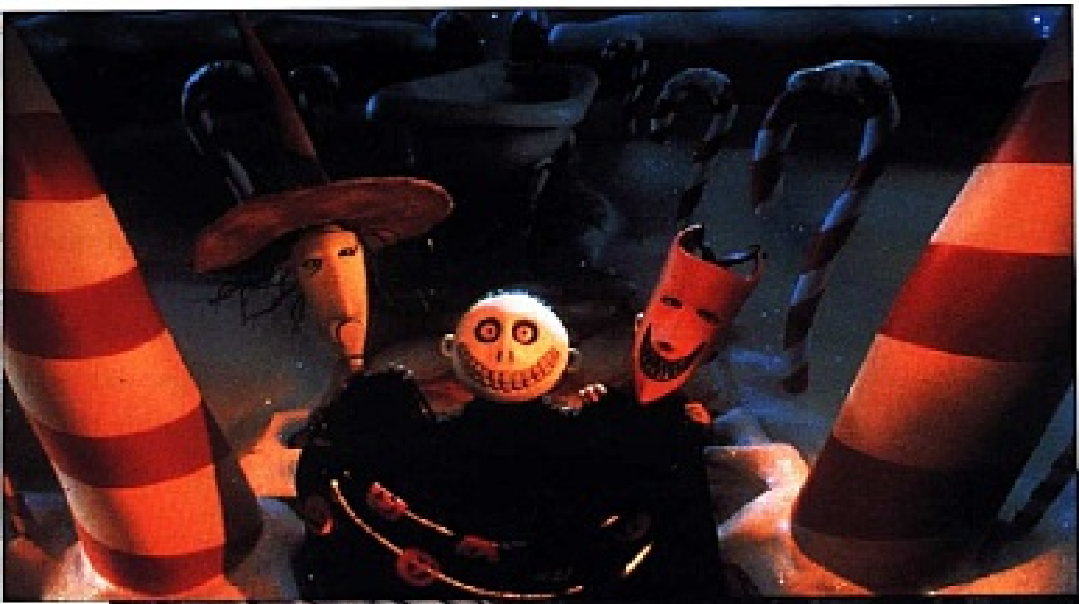


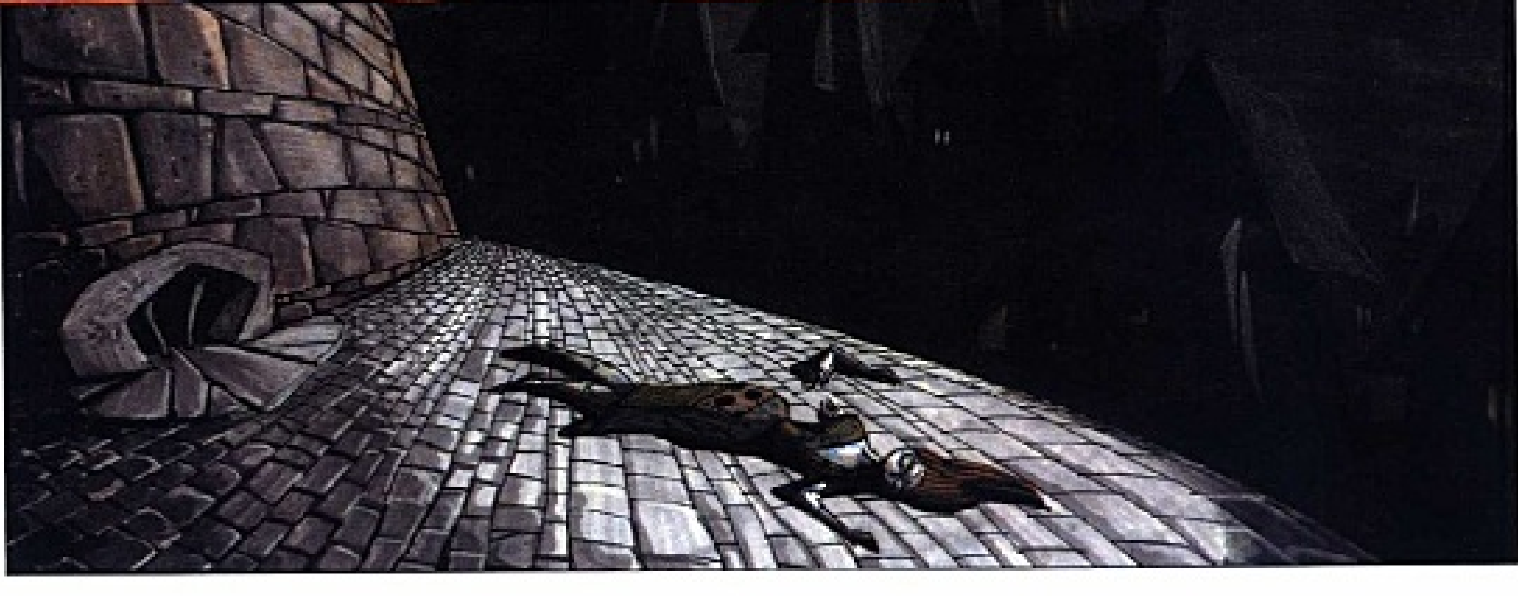


Character designs like those for the Evil Scientist (top right) help guide the sculpting and painting of the puppet (top left), although details often change (for example, the Evil Scientist is never seen standing). A concept for a particular scene (like the view of the treehouse above) may undergo major revisions before the shot is taken (right).

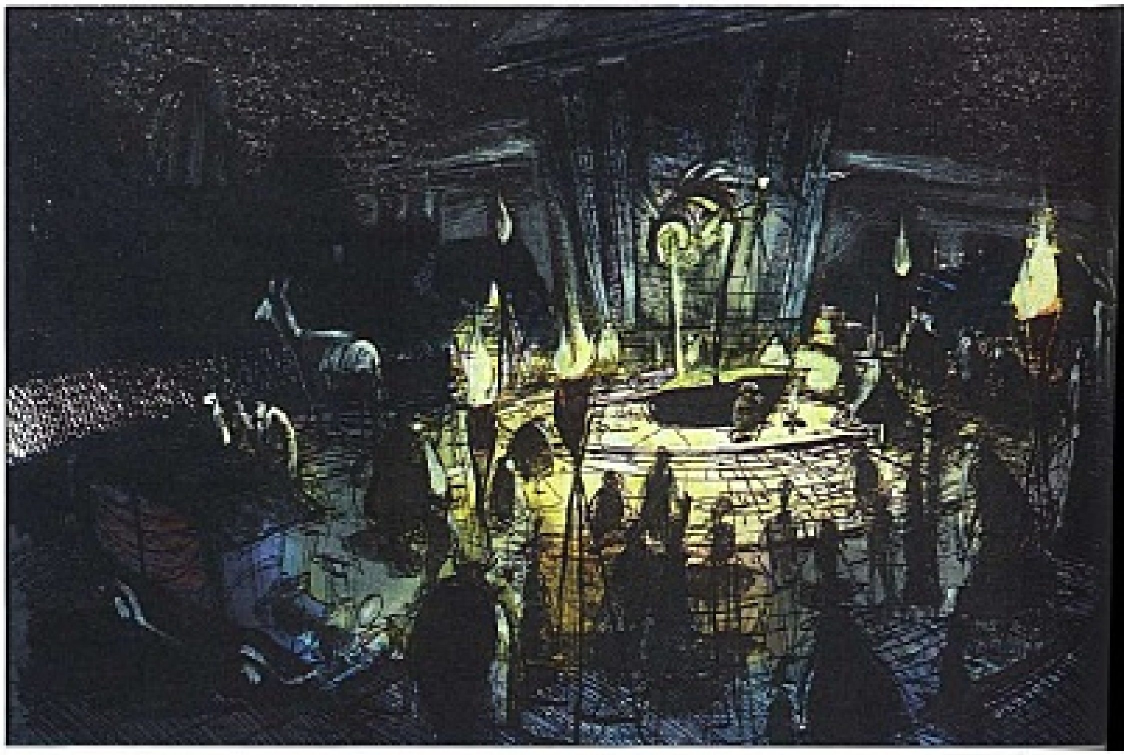


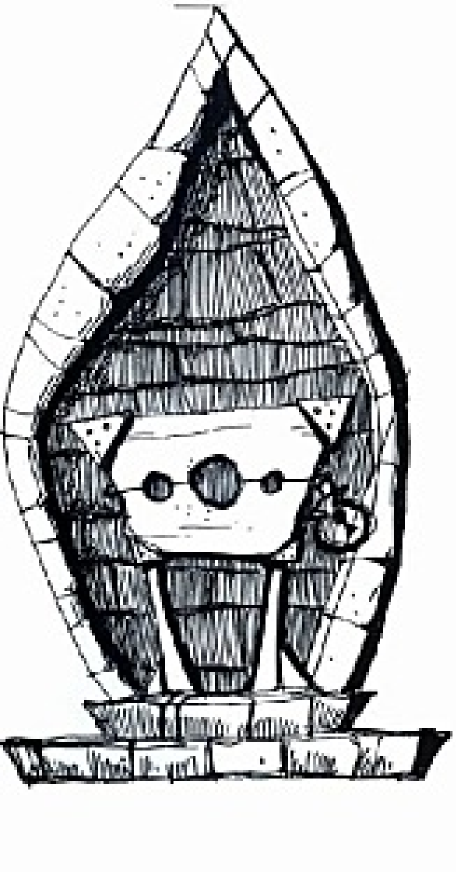
The final rendering (left) of Lock, Shock, and Barrel's arrival at Santa's door adds detail to the storyboard (page 99), and it is followed for the setup of the shot (below left). The same is true of the illustration of Sally after she jumps out of her window (bottom), although the closeup (below) is at a different angle. In both drawings, the background is painted on paper as an empty set (without figures). The characters are placed on an acetate overlay and can be rearranged.





There are several drawings for every set in the film, from the Town Square during the post-Halloween celebration (right) to the Real World interiors on Christmas Eve (opposite). The artist usually draws the scene or a single prop (like the stocks below) in line first, using the medium-point felt-tip pen that Tim Burton favors. If the line drawing is approved by Henry Selick, it is photocopied, and the artist works with markers and colored pencils to try out different color possibilities.





To force himself into drawing things in surprising ways, Asbury, who is right-handed, started drawing with his left hand. "That's when I started getting it," he recalls. "It made everything just a little unsound."

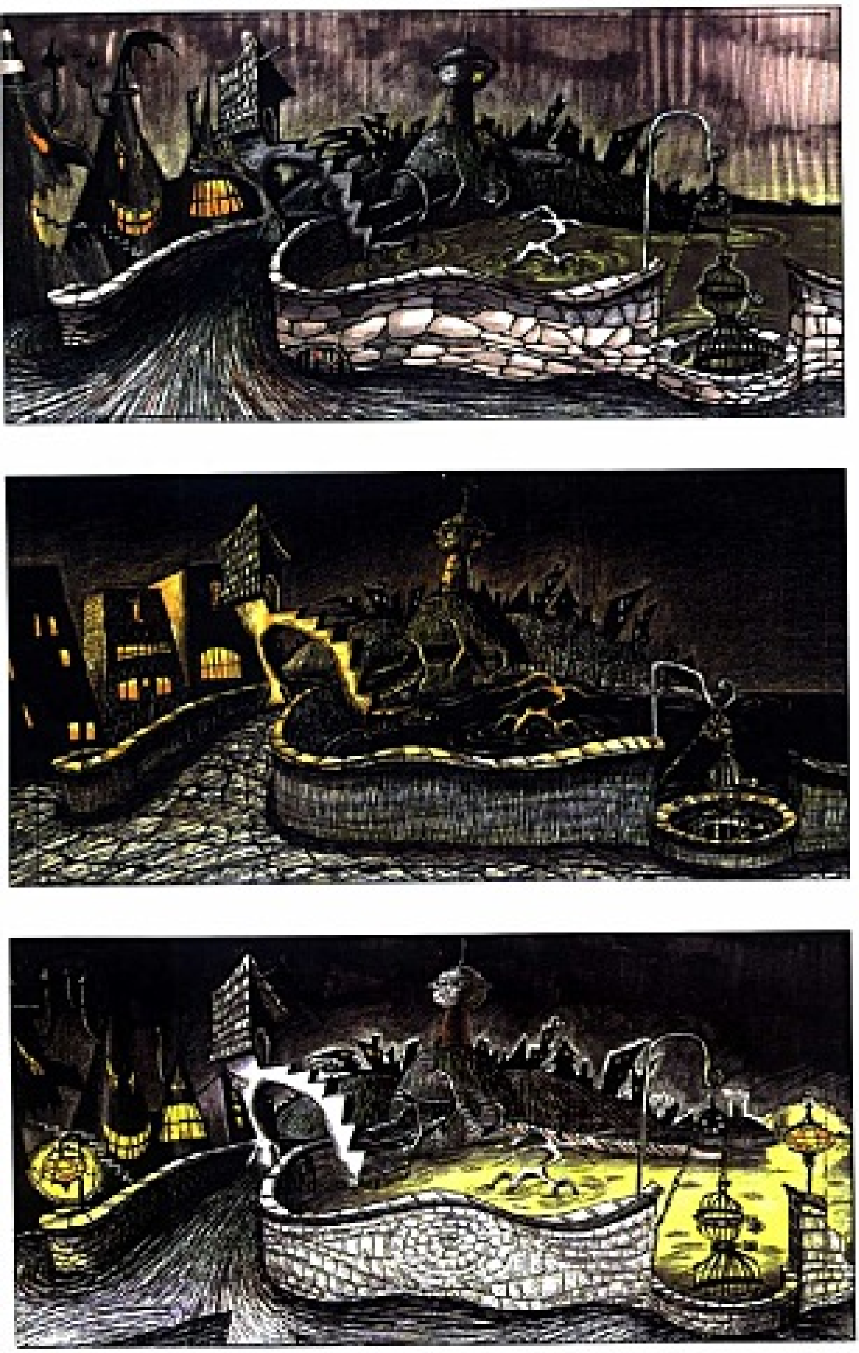
"So we all started drawing with our left hands," Cronkhite interjects, laughing. "It worked completely. It was strange because it's more tentative and you do end up with things off-balance." Boes adds that he suspects "Tim Burton always draws with his opposite hand—and doesn't tell anybody!"

Although the art department devoted considerable attention to individual props such as the Iron Maiden, this was only a small part of their task. By far the most complex aspect of their job was the creation of the four distinct landscapes that make up *Nightmare*'s world.

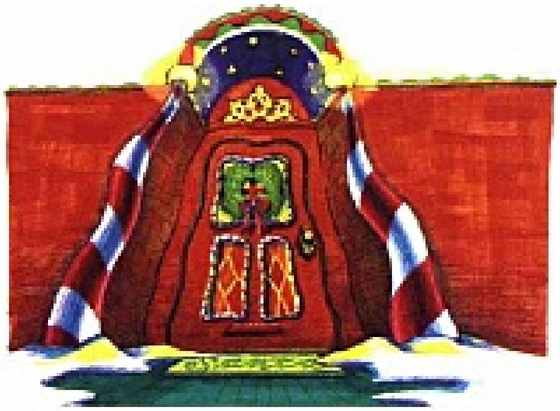
"There's Christmas Town," says Cronkhite, "which is soft and sloppy. It's Dr. Seuss and bright colors, like candy. And then there's Halloweenland, which is German Expressionist, odd angles, on-edge, off-kilter."

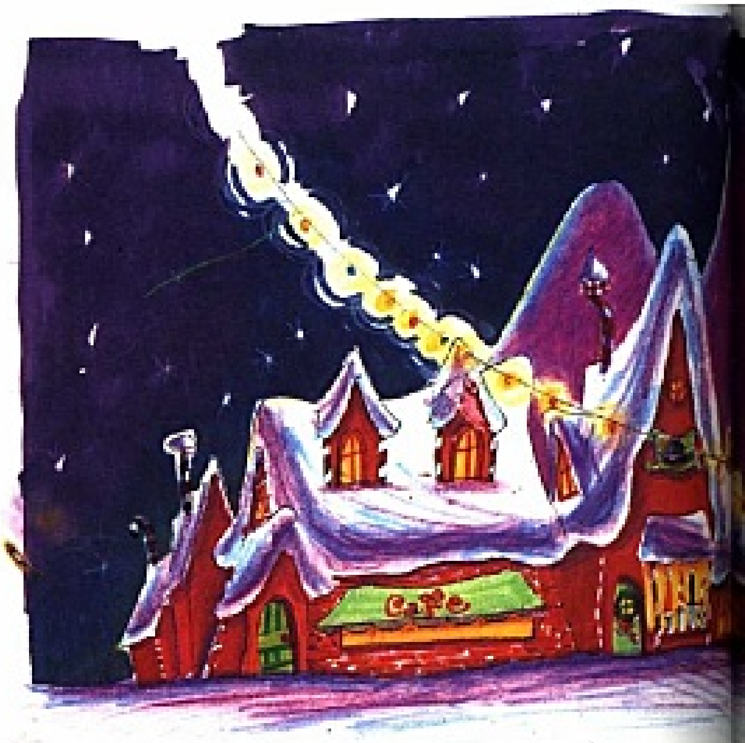
Asbury adds that while Selick wanted Christmas Town to look soft and fluffy as if it were made of candy, "he wanted Halloweenland to be something that, if you ran your hand over it, it would cut you."

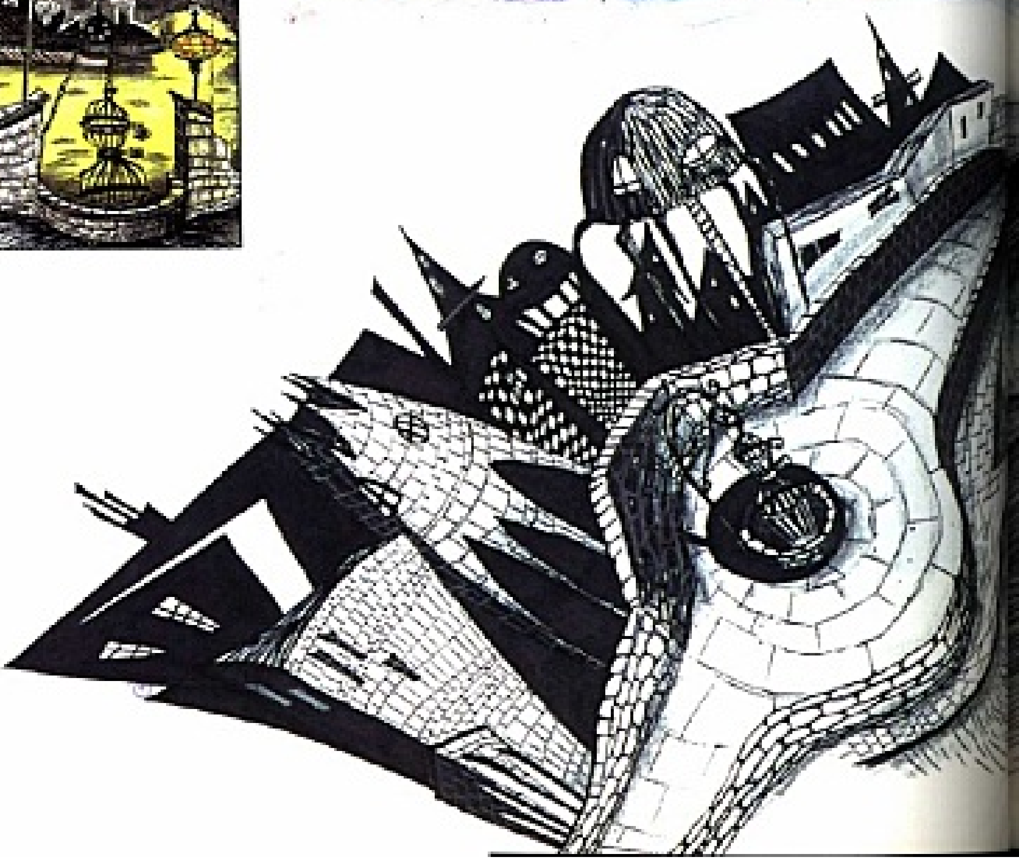
Cronkhite continues, "The Real World is a little bit Bauhaus, as well as 1950s to '60s, very rigid, designed isometrically." As Asbury puts it, "With its pastel primary colors, its rigidness and right angles, the Real World is almost weirder than Halloweenland."

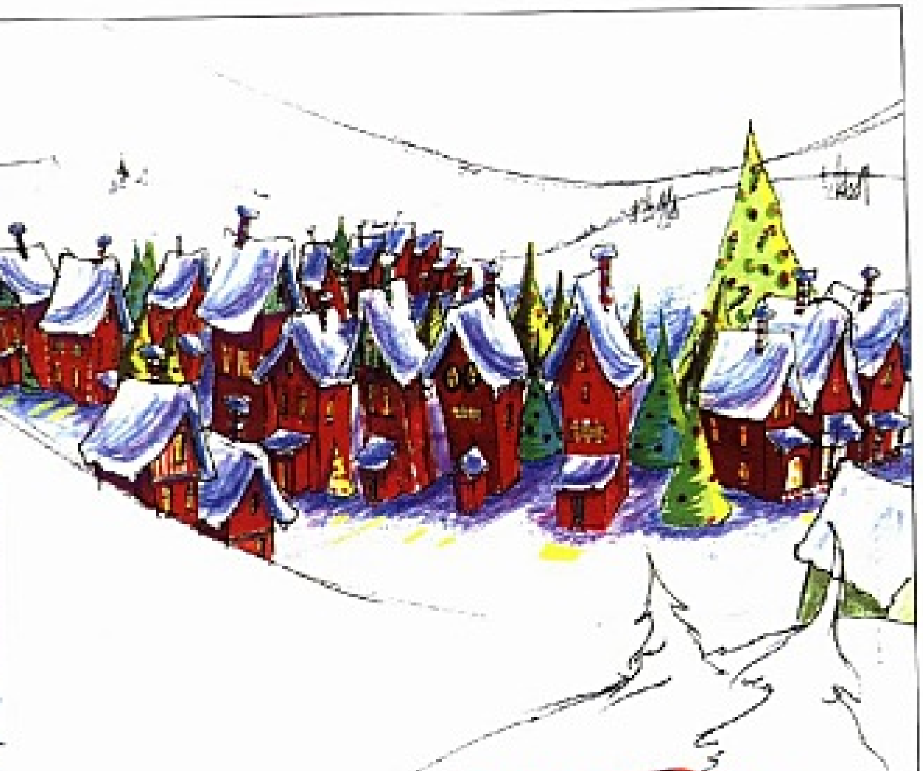


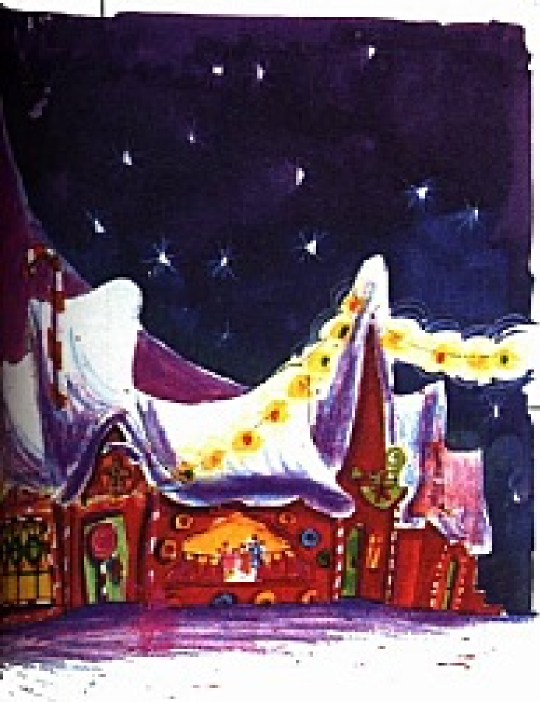
The drawings above show three slightly different ideas for the street leading to the Evil Scientist's lab. Similar studies exist for the other main streets of Halloween Town. The angular, expressionistic style that characterizes Halloween Town is accentuated in the overview of Town Square (right).

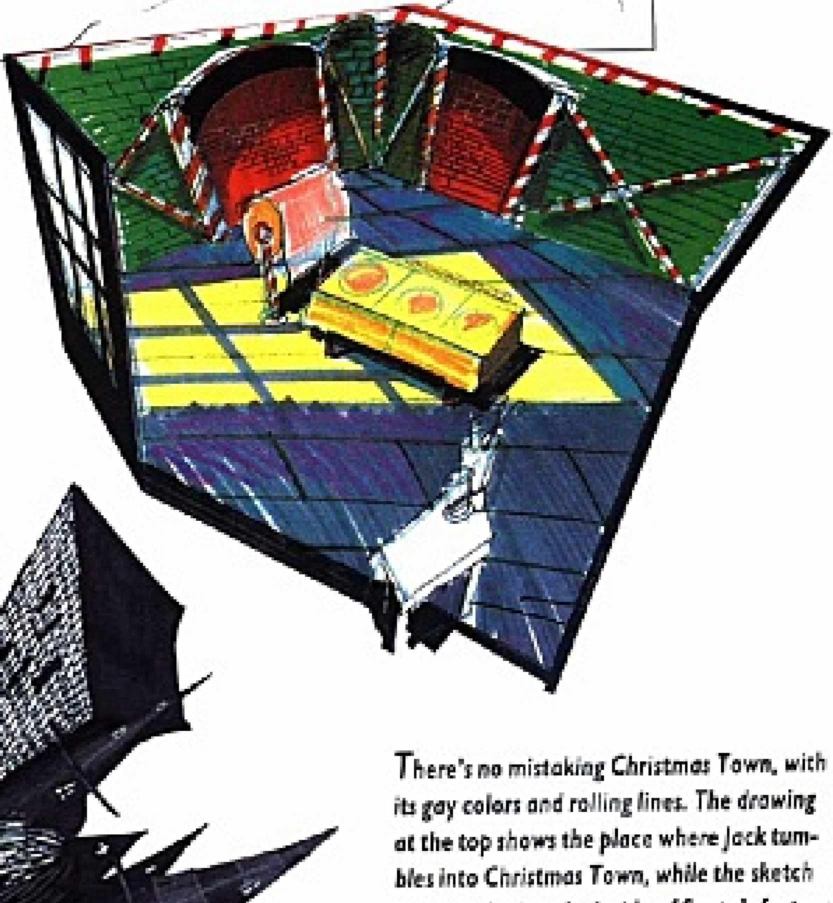


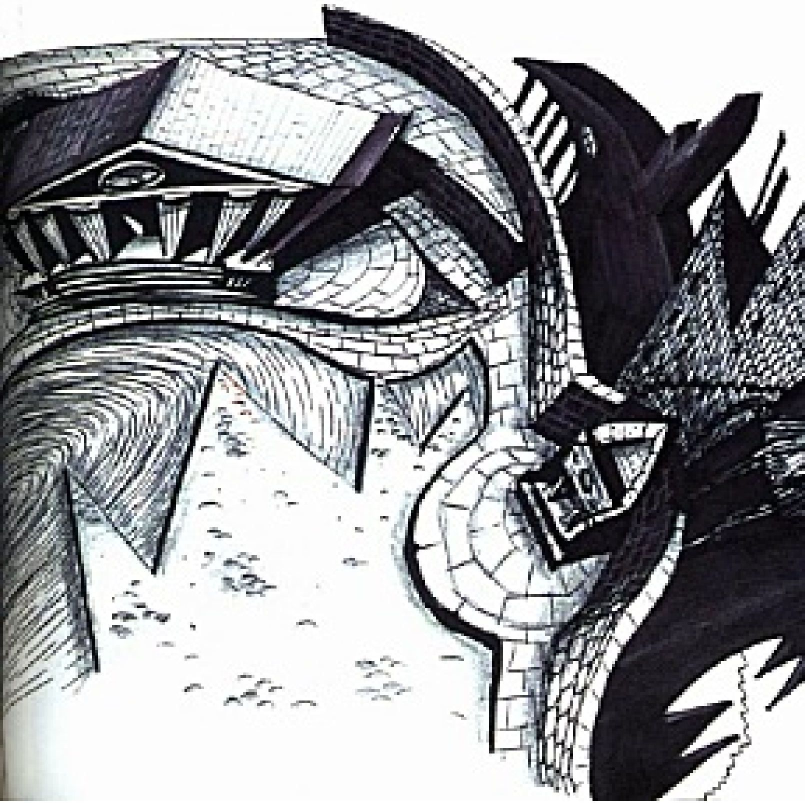




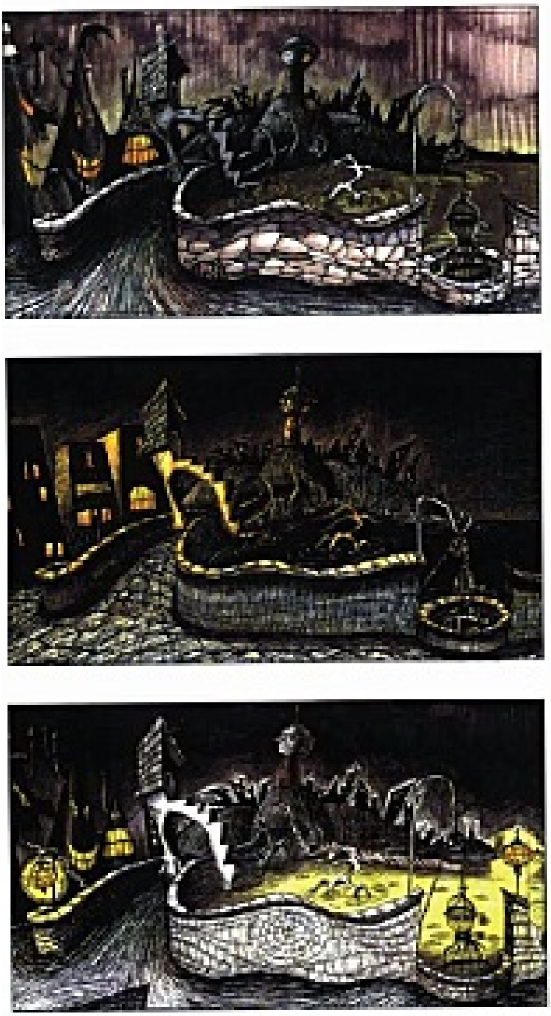




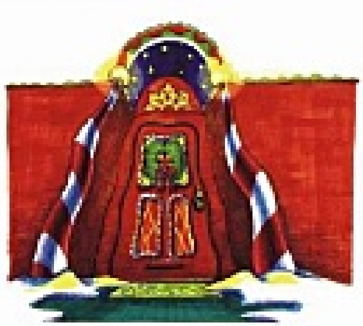


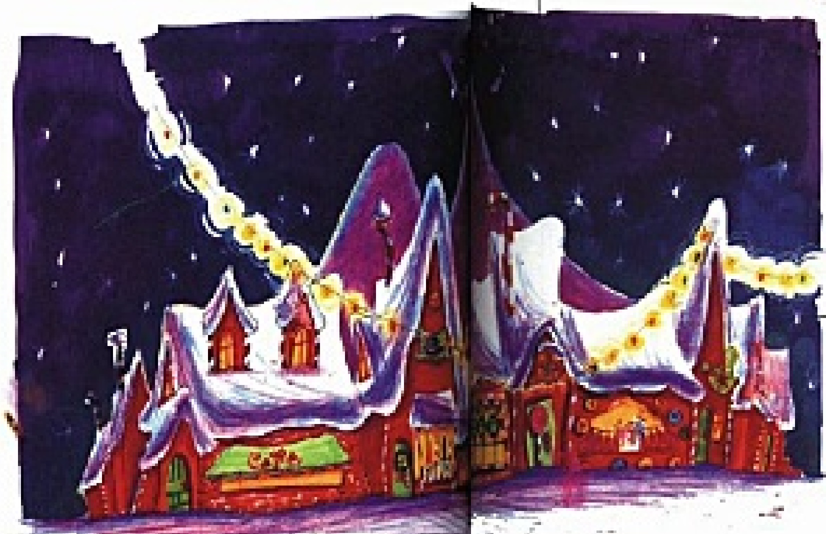


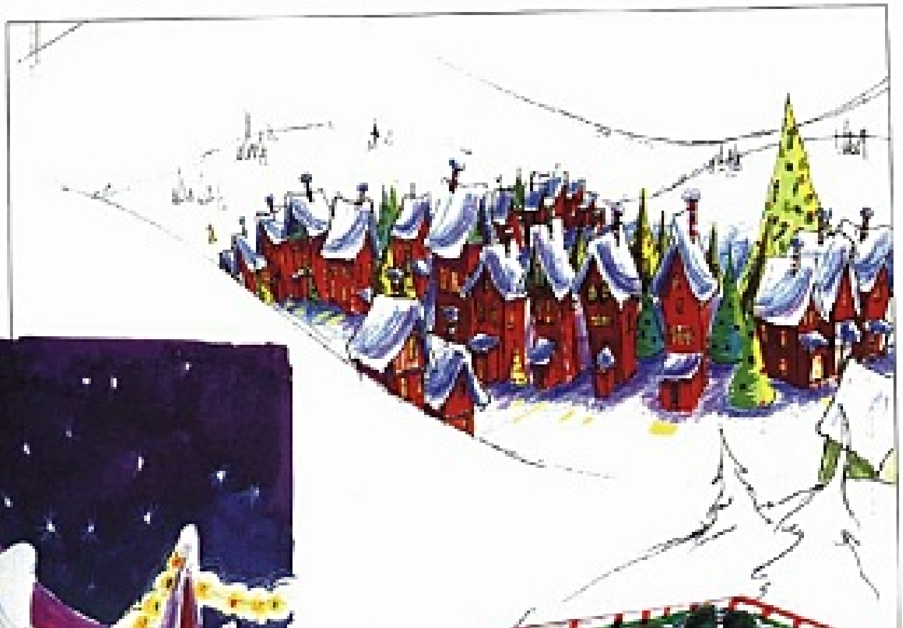
There's no mistaking Christmas Town, with its gay colors and rolling lines. The drawing at the top shows the place where Jack tumbles into Christmas Town, while the sketch below it depicts the inside of Santa's factory (used for the shot on page 152).

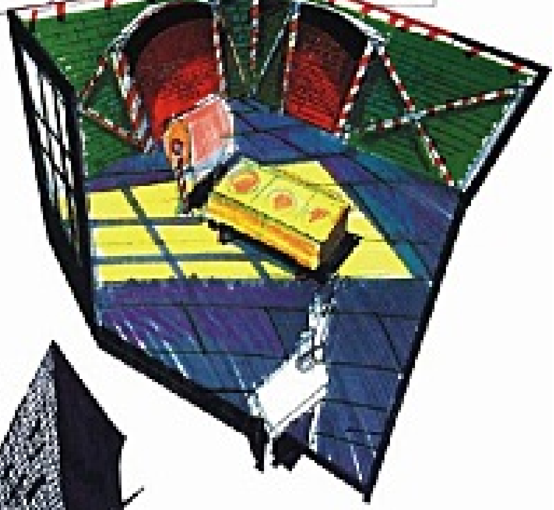


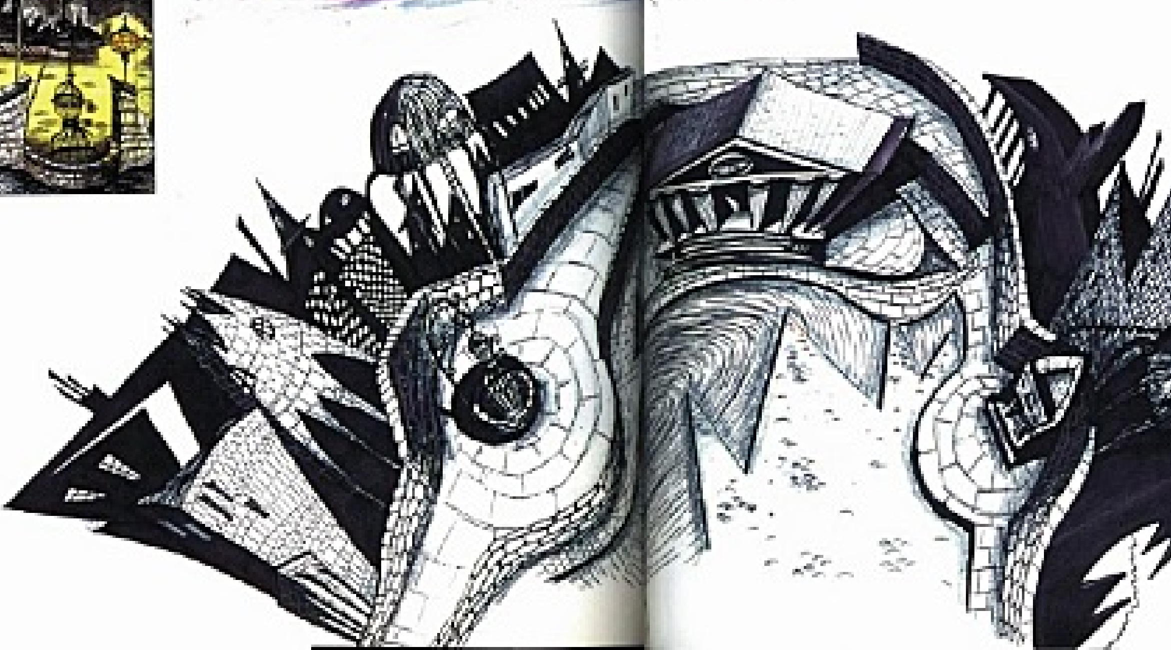
The drawings above show three slightly different ideas for the street leading to the Evil Scientist's lab. Similar studies exist for the other main streets of Halloween Town. The angular, expressionistic style that characterizes Halloween Town is accentuated in the overview of Town Square (right).











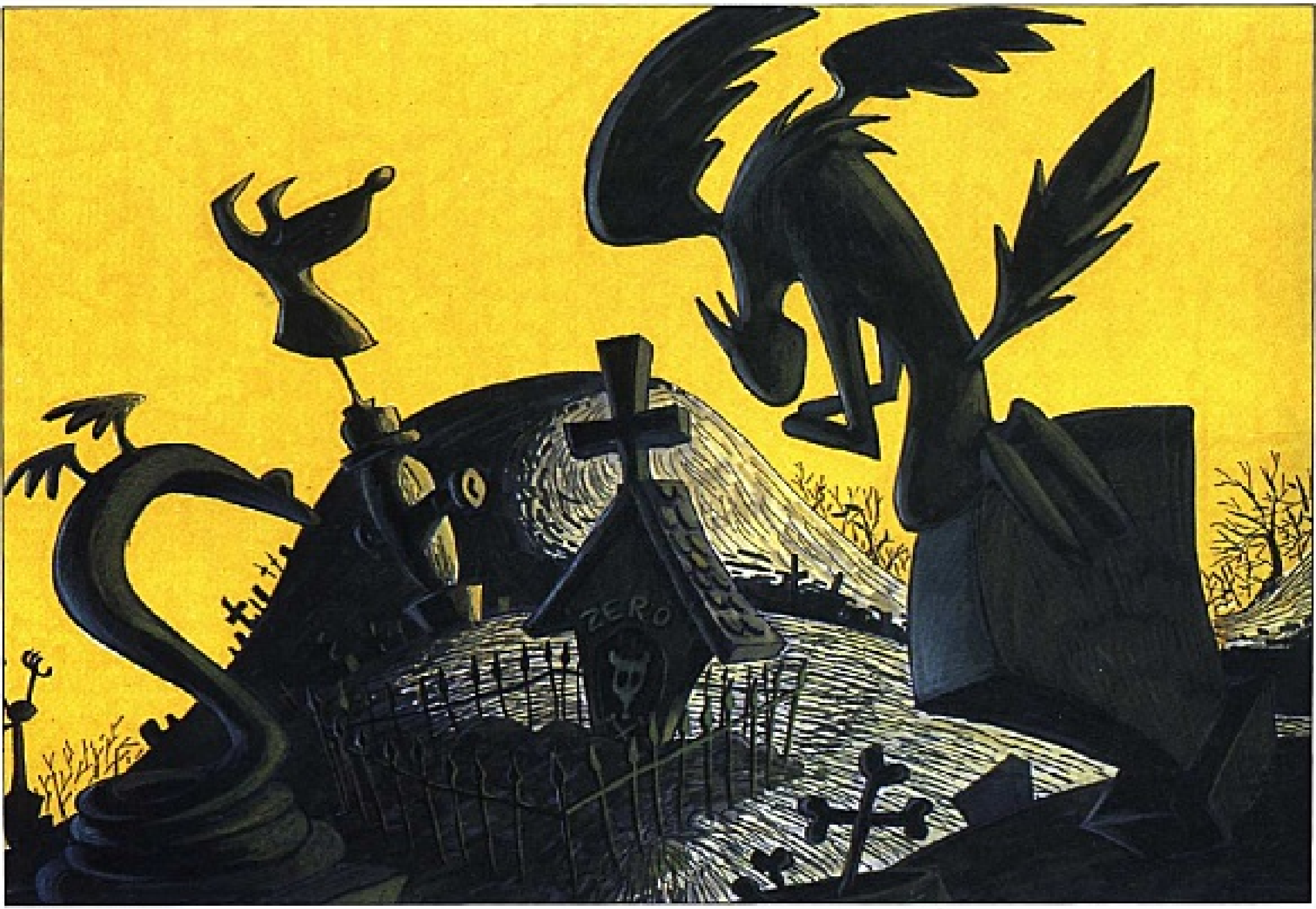
There's no mistaking Christmas Town, with its gay colors and rolling lines. The drawing at the top shows the place where Jack tumbles into Christmas Town, while the sketch below it depicts the inside of Santa's factory (used for the shot on page 152).

This weirdness is no accident. Taylor explains that by using isometric drawing pads in designing the Real World, the artists made sure that every object they drew lacked perspective. In contrast, Taylor points out, "Halloweenland has a totally bent perspective, and Christmas Town is kind of forced and squat." Because the artists were formal about the design approach, Taylor notes, "the Real World ended up looking weird by itself—quite disconcerting."

Boes feels that designing Oogie Boogie's lair was the weirdest experience. Selick wanted it to look one way under regular light and a different way under ultraviolet light. To accomplish this dual look, the artists conducted a series of tests, using mockups built by Boes and painting them with ultraviolet paints.

"In Oogie Boogie's lair, when the lights are on, you see all these torture devices, heavy steel and jagged edges," says Cronkhite. "But when the lights go off and the black light comes on, it's more naive, sort of

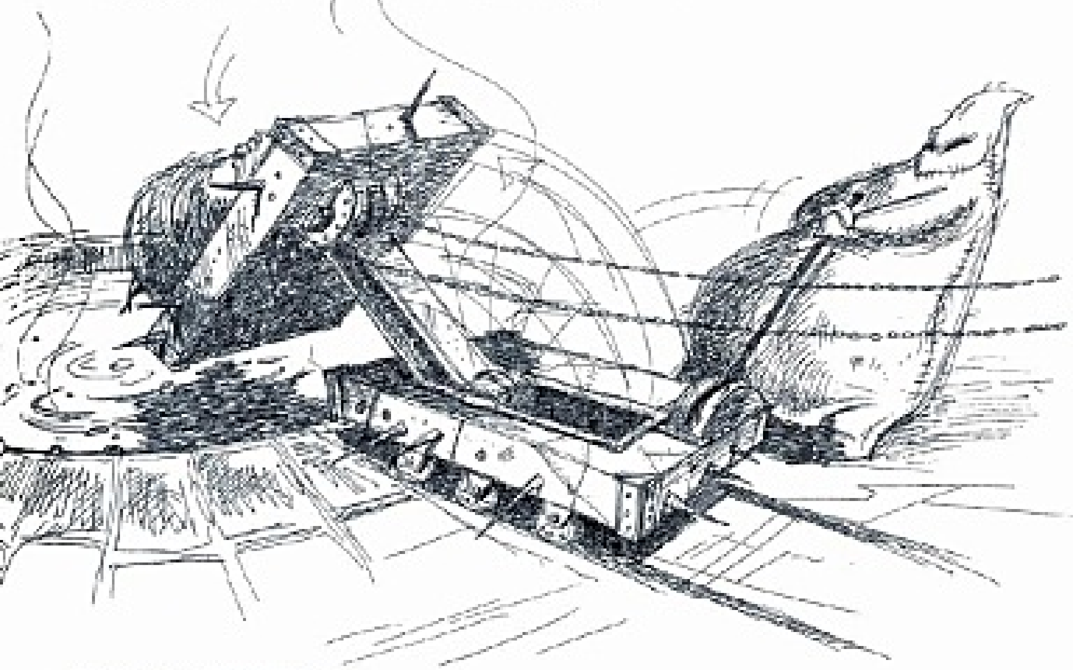
This preliminary drawing leads giddily in to the Halloweenland cemetery. The off-beat monuments jutting at odd angles contrast with the neatly rounded gravestones in the Real World cemetery (see page 19).

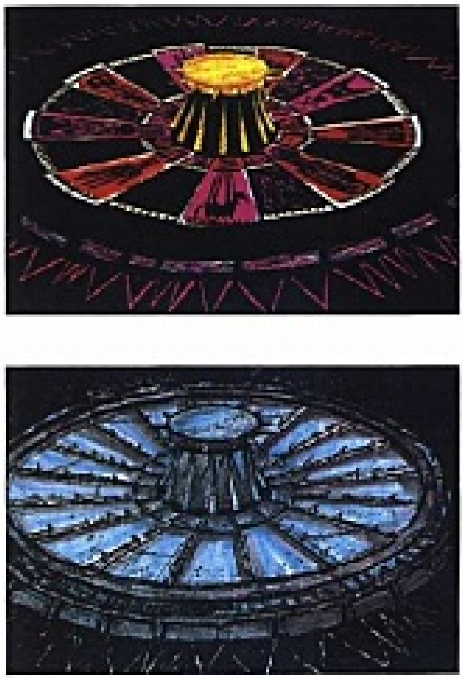


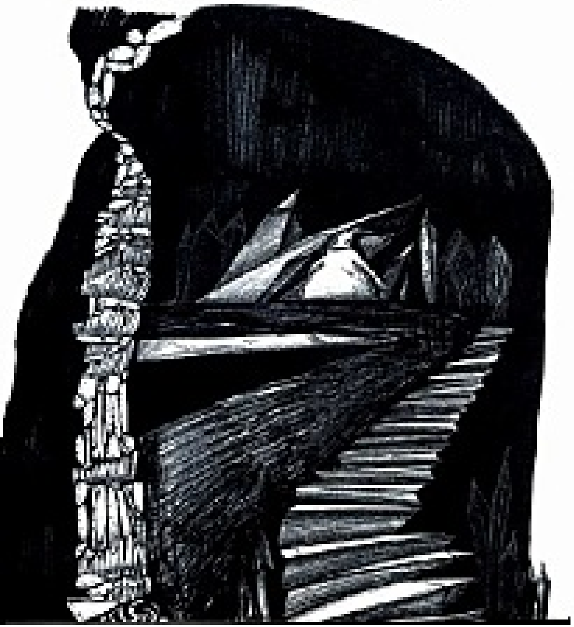
primitive, almost aboriginal." Asbury adds, "We studied cave paintings as inspiration."

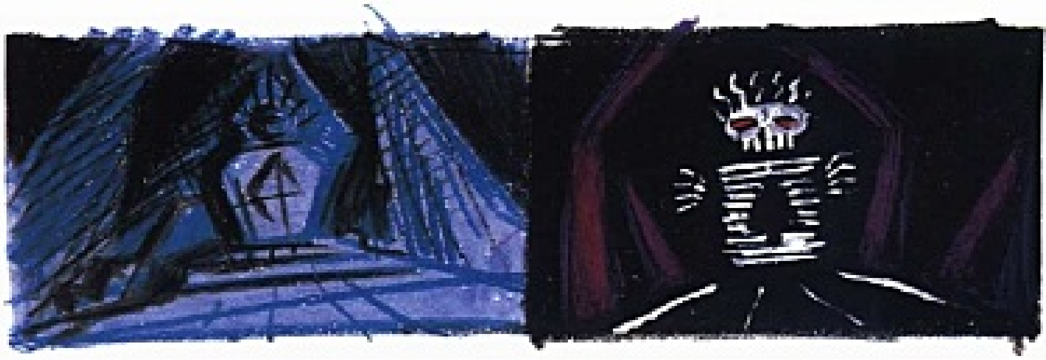
Tim Burton's original drawings, as well as Rick Heinrichs's input, gave the art department the basic style and feeling for Halloweenland and Christmas Town, but they had to imagine the Real World and Oogie's lair from the ground up. Still, the odd rigidity of the Real World seems directly related to the bizarre suburban landscapes that have populated so many of Burton's films: Pee-wee's playhouse-gone-berserk in *Pee-wee's Big Adventure,* the gothic suburbia of *Frankenweenie,* the multihued cul-de-sac in *Edward Scissorhands.* In a way this is a tribute to these artists' ability to join fully in Burton's vision and enrich it. "Tim isn't around for all the nuts and bolts," comments Taylor, "but he's right in there in keeping an overall look, an overall feel. He's quite involved in the story, but with the day-to-day things, the hands-on stuff, he seems to be confident enough in what he's seen to let us go ahead."

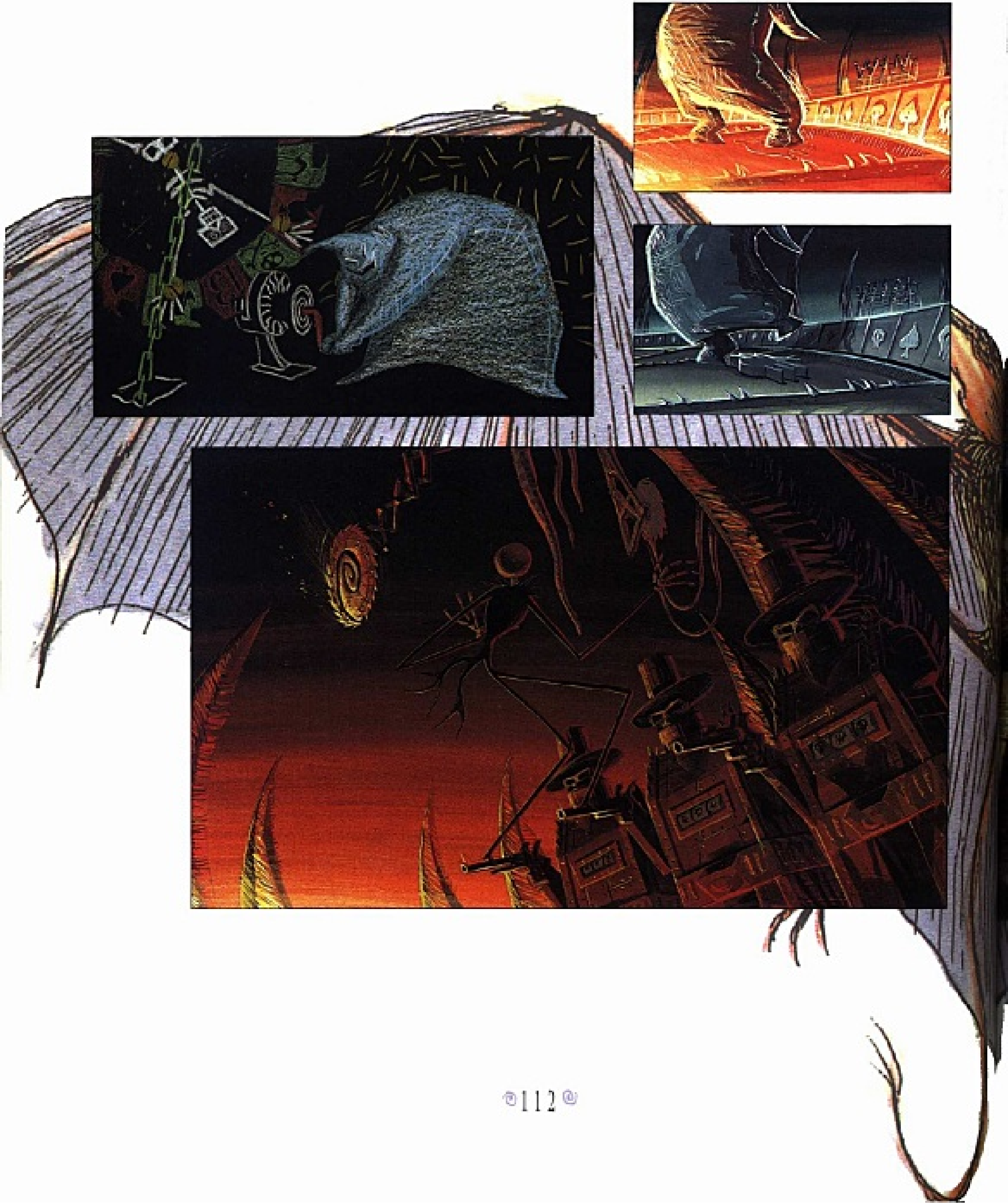
The art department showed Henry Selick dozens of ideas for Oogie's lair (bottom, far left) and his nightmarish torture devices (such as the sacrificial table below left). To make the task even more complicated, the artists had to figure out how each object's color would change in normal light and black, or ultraviolet, light—as suggested by the color studies for Oogie's roulette wheel (below) and the Iron Maiden (bottom).

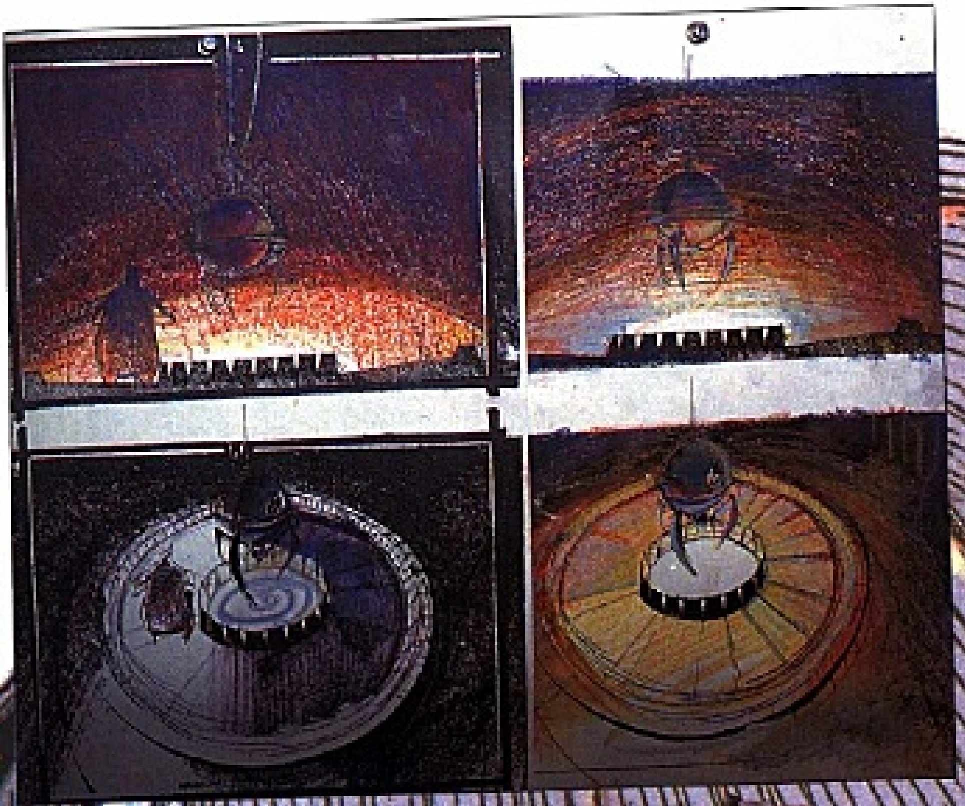


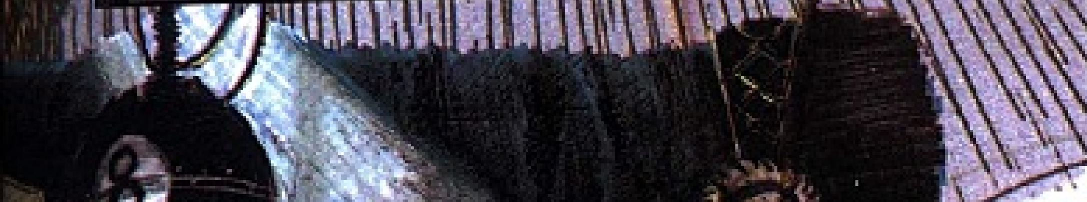


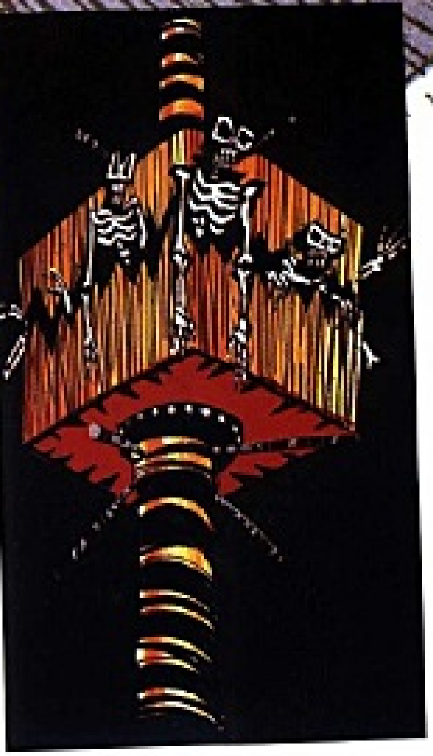




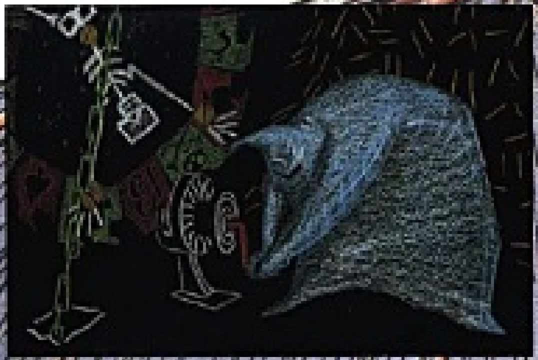


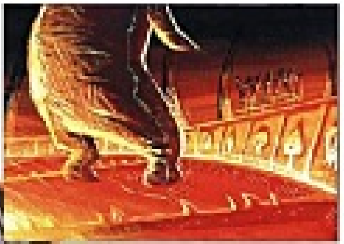


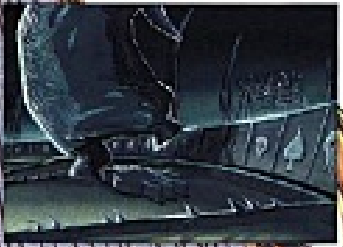


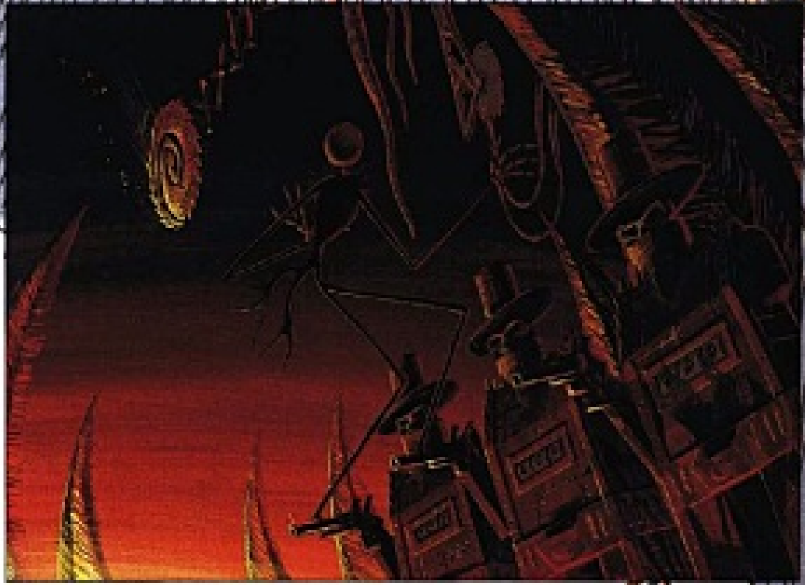


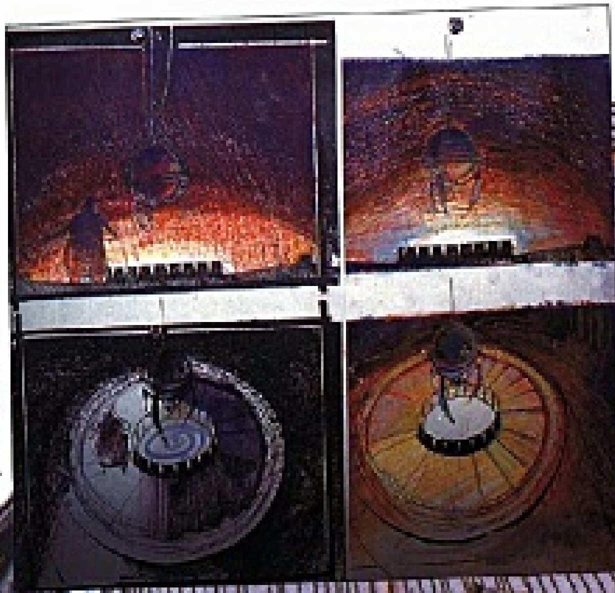
The changing nature of Oogie's lair can be seen in studies ranging from a preliminary overview in natural light (left), to an early idea for black light (opposite, middle left), to color designs for the snake and spider stew (top) and a rendering of the "crusher" in black light (above). The other drawings (opposite) show Oogie's fight with Jack—dubbed the hell light sequence because of the supersaturated red-and-orange lighting.

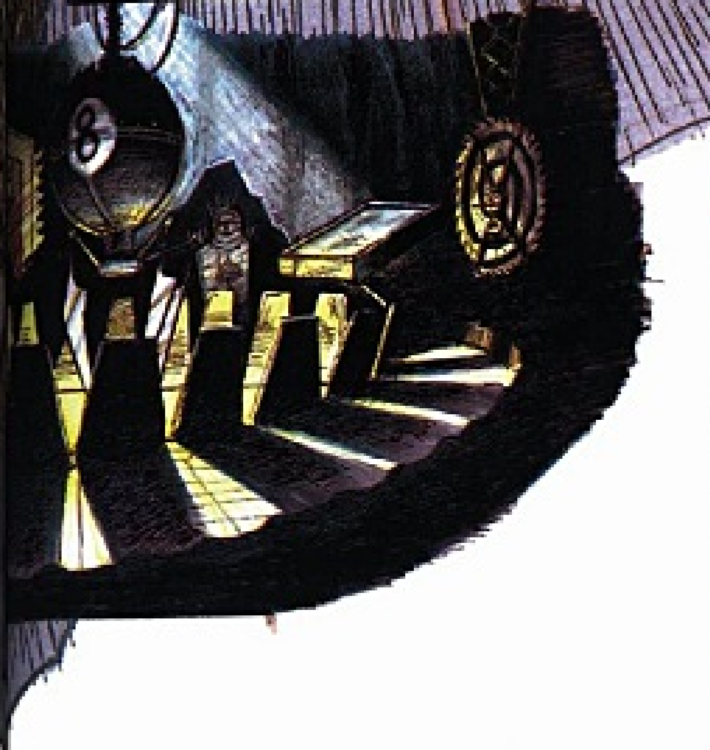


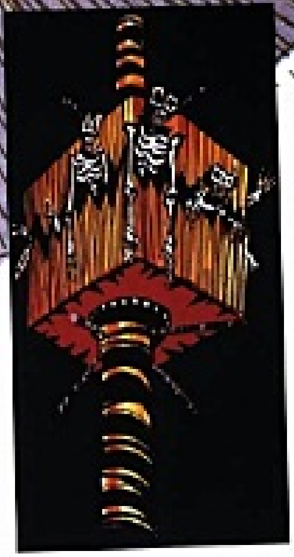












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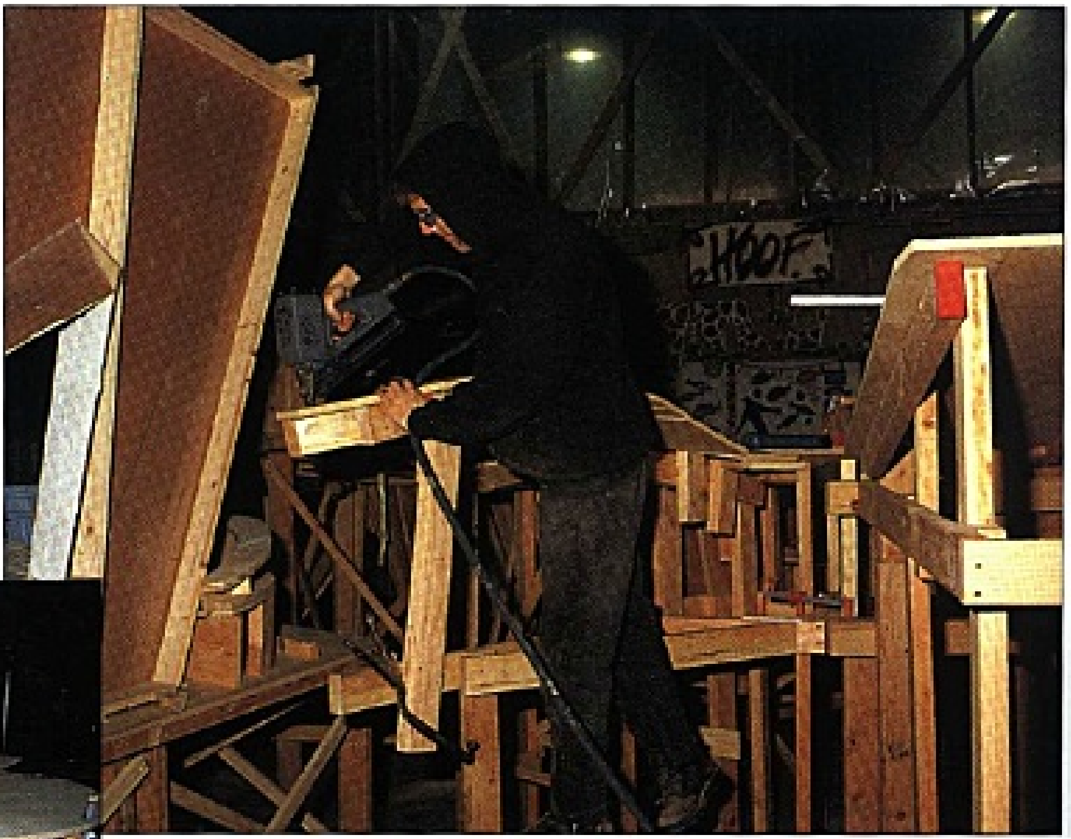
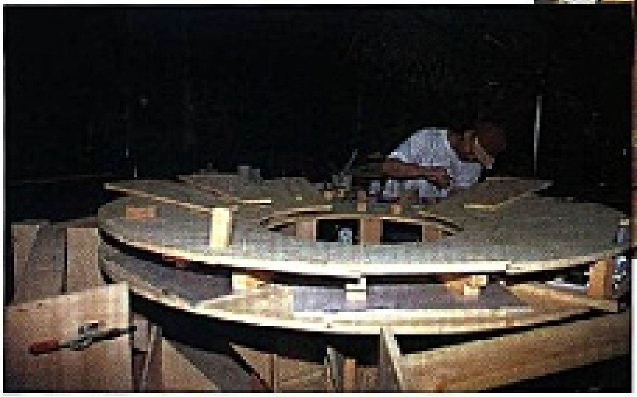
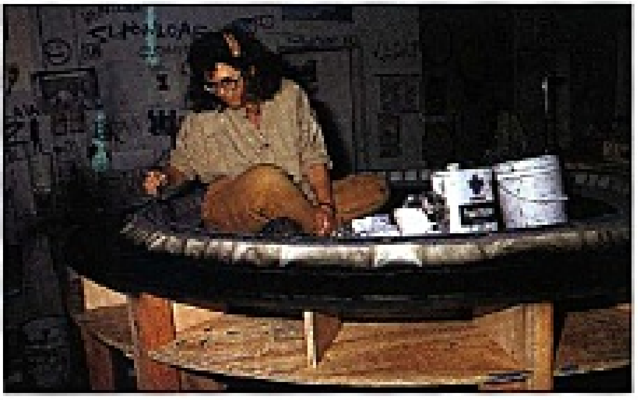
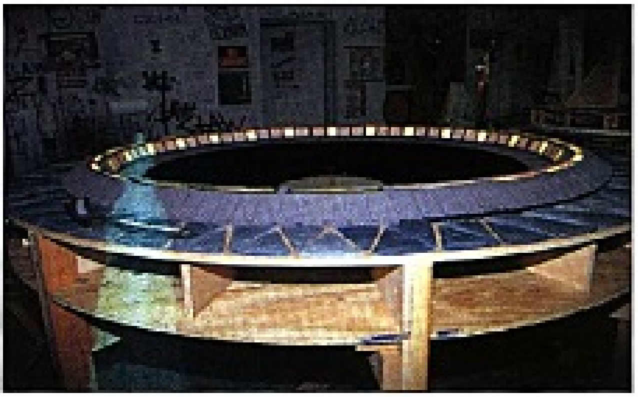
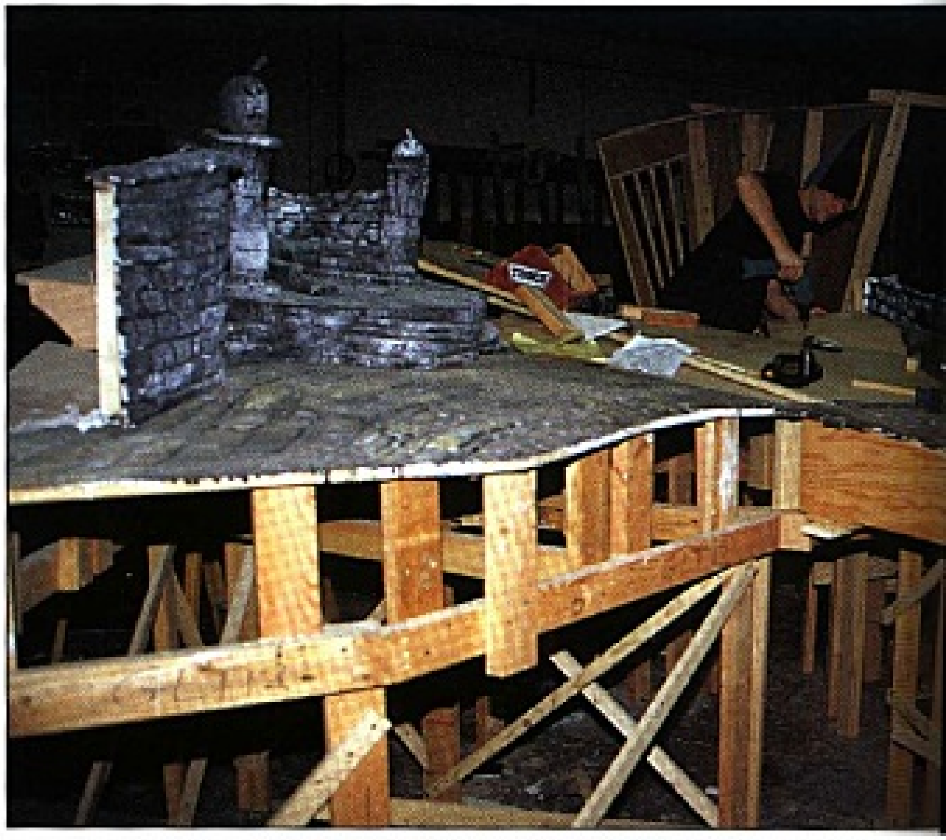
After Tom Proost builds one of six copies of Oogie's roulette wheel (below), Stephanie Lesh paints it for use in normal light. Other wheels were coated with ultraviolet paint to turn fluorescent in black light. At right Todd Lookinland works on a large set of Halloween Town after receiving directions from Bo Henry (opposite, left). After the set is built, the surfaces are textured with Styrofoam and various plaster mixes.











SET AND PROP DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

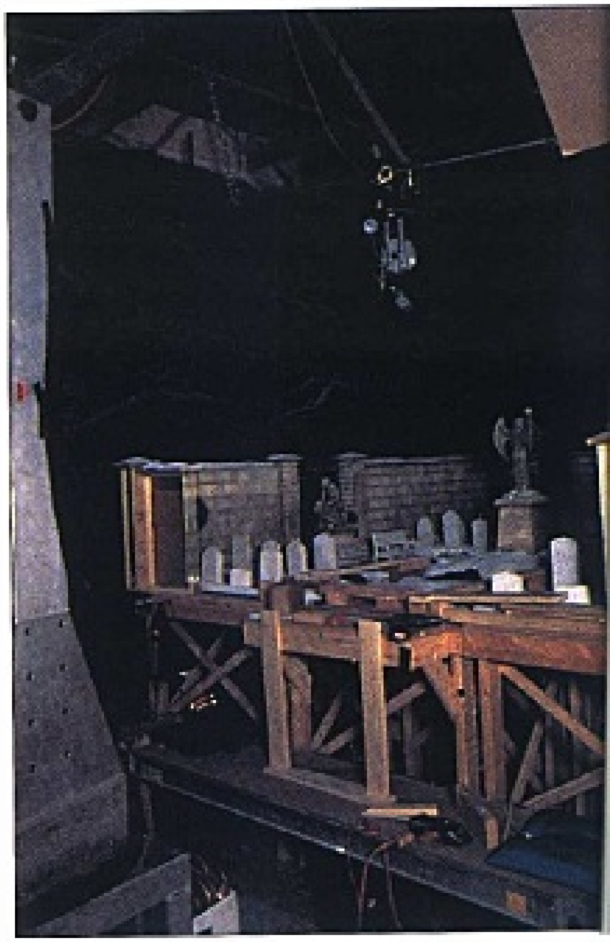
In the art department imagination soars. Within the confines of the story, and the directives of Tim Burton and Henry Selick, the artists are free to create whatever they want. And when they have conjured up a fantastical set, they send their vision down to Bo Henry, the set construction supervisor, and he gets it built.

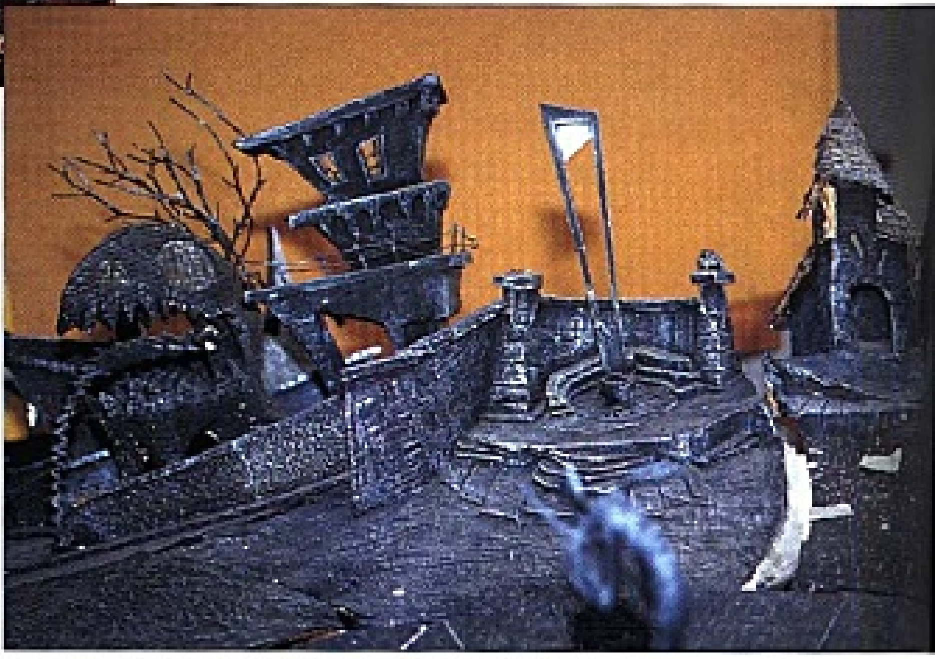
Visit a live-action movie set and, chances are, everything will seem flimsy and temporary. Buildings that look perfectly solid on screen may be only thin fronts of plaster or canvas. The opposite is true on the *Nightmare* set—presenting a challenge to the set construction department.

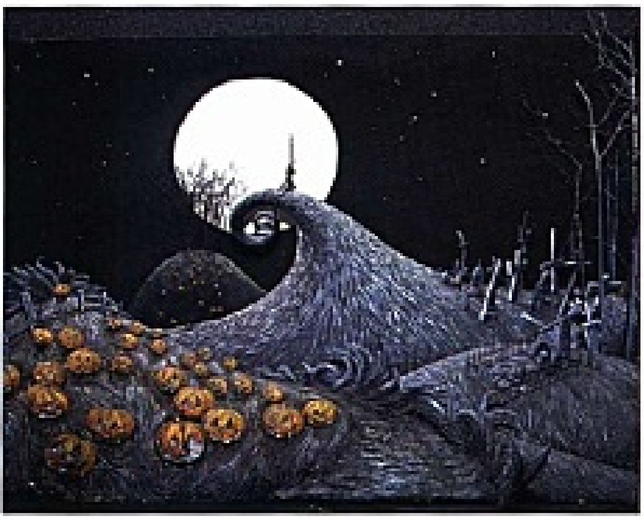
"You build these incredibly detailed, highly sculptural, fanciful sets," Bo Henry says, "but underneath they're screwed and cross-braced and ugly—because the sets are literally abused and misused by animators and camerapeople." The sets have to be strong enough to hang lights on and to support the weight of animators, who may have to crawl onto a set to move the puppets. Moreover, every set has to be rock solid, because if anything were to jiggle, slip, move, or break, the shot would be lost. If the set doesn't hold up, Henry underlines, "it may be twelve or fourteen hours' work for the animator down the drain."

To the observer it seems surprising that in many instances this dauntingly high-tech work is done without intricate blueprints. Generally, Henry receives a drawing from the art department. After consulting with Selick and supervising animator Eric Leighton to find out precisely how the set will be used, set designer Gregg Olsson builds a model. Henry and Olsson determine where the camera needs to go, where the set

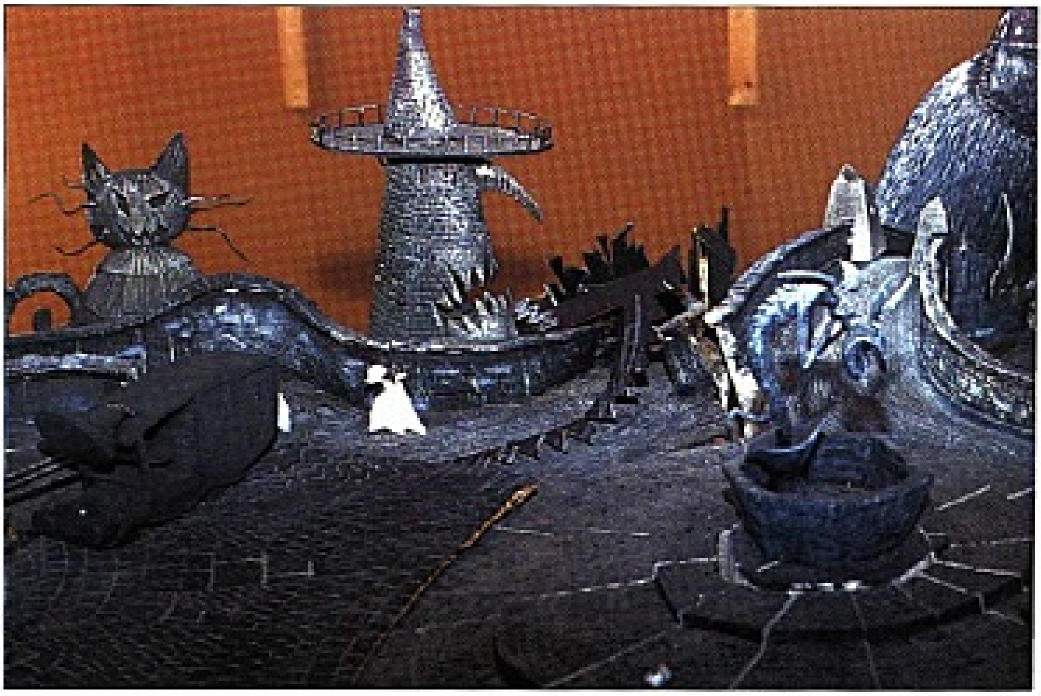
Even a relatively simple set, like the one for the Real World cemetery below, requires a sturdy, heavily braced wooden framework. The horizontal surface is equally solid, made of high-density particleboard, so the characters can be screwed tightly in place.







Models of Halloweenland (right and top) and the curling hill in its cemetery (above) guided set construction, as well as later detail drawings by the art department. Rick Heinrichs, who was instrumental in developing the look of Halloweenland, underlines a distinct advantage of creating sets for stop-motion animation: "You're free to design whatever you want without the limitations imposed by full size and live action."



can break apart for various camera angles within the shot, where lights have to hang, and where trap doors (for access) can be hidden.

"The camera is five or six times bigger than the characters," Henry points out, "so the set has to be built specifically to allow the camera to get into a position where it can read the images. In live action you can hide a light behind a column or place it overhead. Here, a light is bigger than the entire set, so we have to plan on that from the beginning."

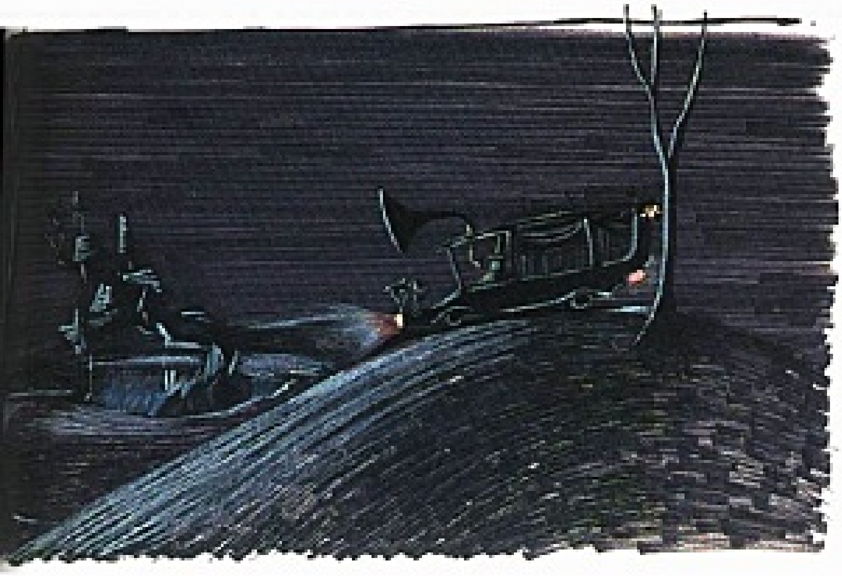
Once Henry and Olsson have figured out the logistics, a detailed model and some relatively simple construction drawings are sent to the shop. The working drawings are little more than floor plans; the shop technicians pull most of the detail from Olsson's model and the art department's illustrations.

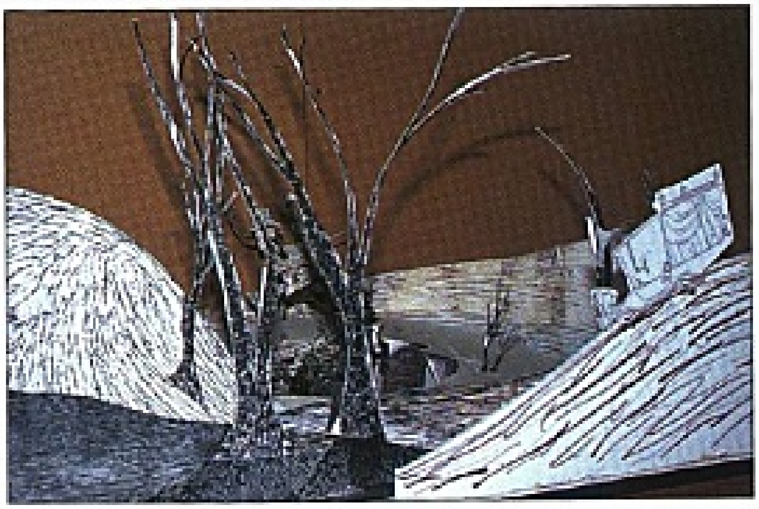
"This is a young crew," Henry says, "which is great since they don't have the normal expectations that a more senior crew might have. They don't ask, 'Where are the drawings?' They just take this stuff and build it without complaint. They can be relied on to be responsible for creating it out of their own heads, using just some fairly open-ended information."

In a project filled with challenges, Bo Henry remembers one set that seemed both unusual and impossible. Early in the film, when Jack Skellington is wandering in the forest, he discovers a group of "holiday" trees. He is drawn to one with a brightly colored Christmas tree door. As he reaches for the shiny doorknob, we see the forest behind him reflected in its surface. The doorknob and its reflection are on screen for only a second; few in the audience suspect how much labor was involved in attaining the shot.

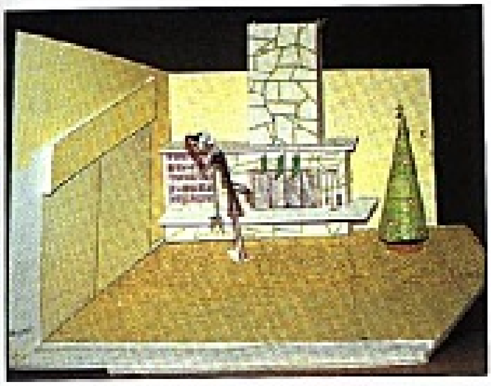
"The crew had to work inside an eight-by-eight-by-eight-foot box for two weeks, creating a forced perspective image of what Jack sees in the

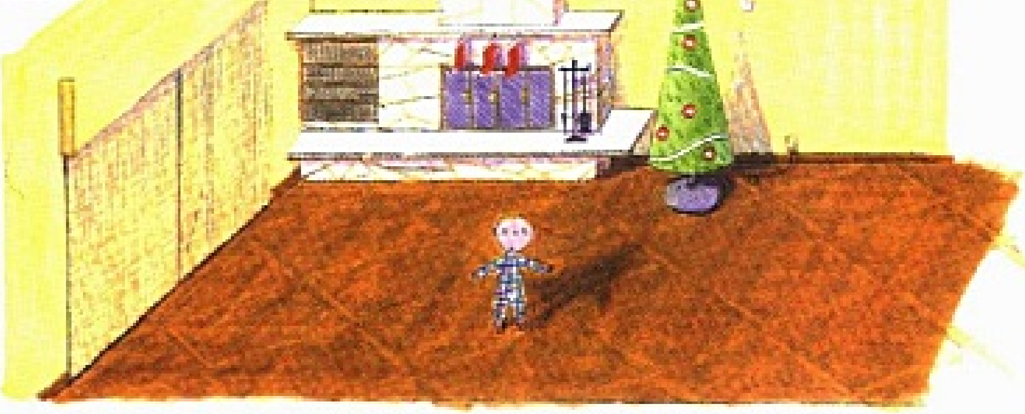
A drawing for a shot (like the one below of the Mayor announcing Jack's death) is translated into a small three-dimensional mock-up for the set builders to follow. Here the pen lines are important as a blueprint for getting texture to move through the set.

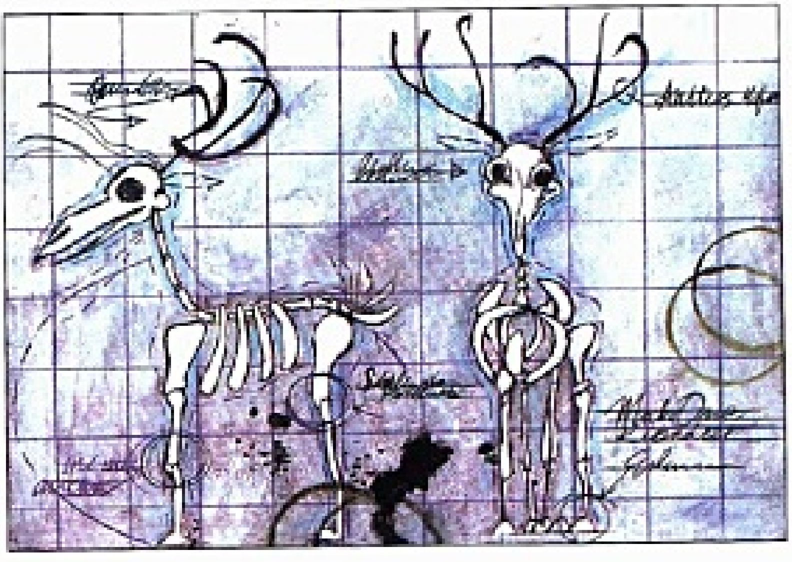


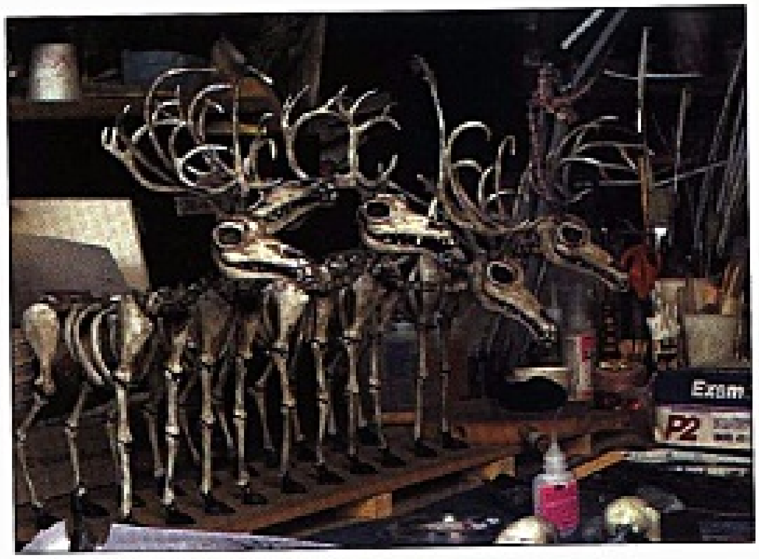


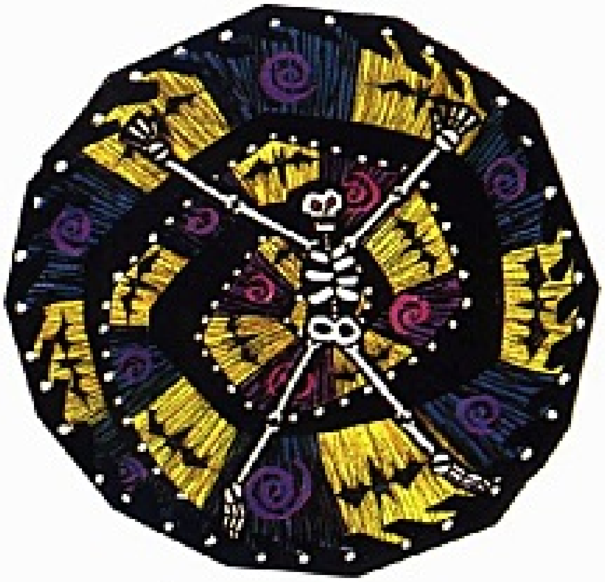
Everything in the miniature world of stop-motion animation has to be constructed. A separate set, requiring weeks of work, was built for the reflected view in the doorknob (left), which appears for just seconds on screen. In transforming the drawing and model of Timmy's living room (middle) into a set, all the details, including the fire irons, had to be fabricated. And not only were the skeletal reindeer created, but also the Evil Scientist's plans for them (bottom).



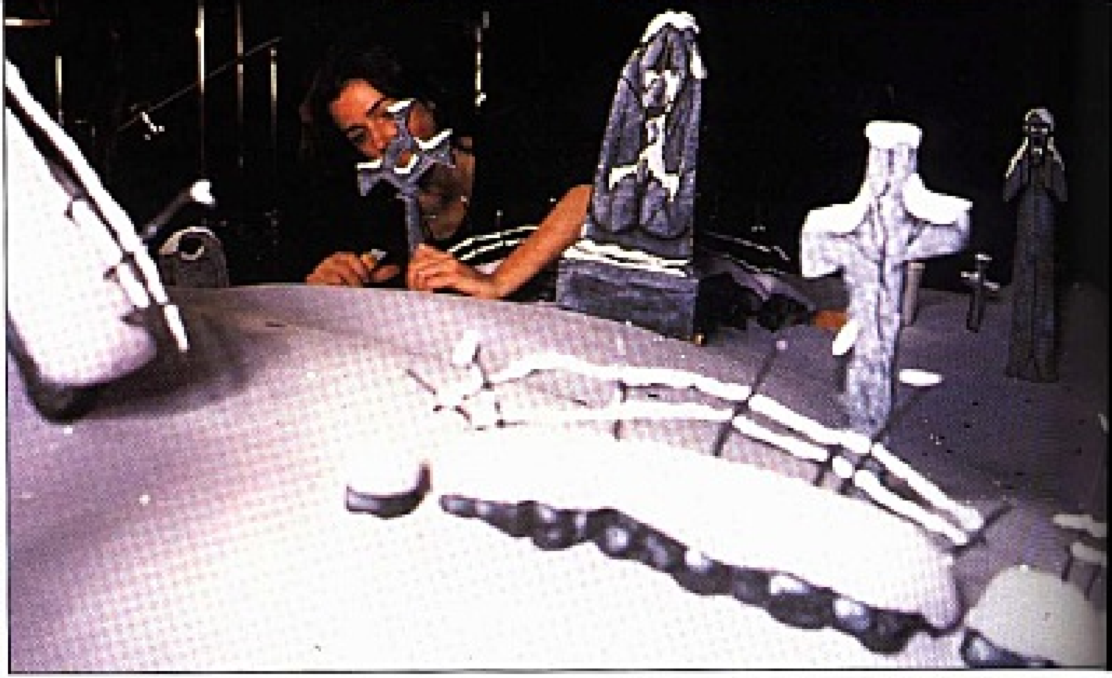








After turning a drawing of Oogie's Wheel of Misfortune into an actual object, Gretchen Scharfenberg checks its switchboard to make sure the tiny lights go on and off around the wheel (top). Fon Davis (above) follows an existing version of Jack's tower in constructing a new set. For the Halloween Town gate, Norm DeCarlo (above right) fashions a master sculpture, from which duplicates can be cast. On the set Scharfenberg (right) adds final touches to the snow-covered Halloweenland cemetery.



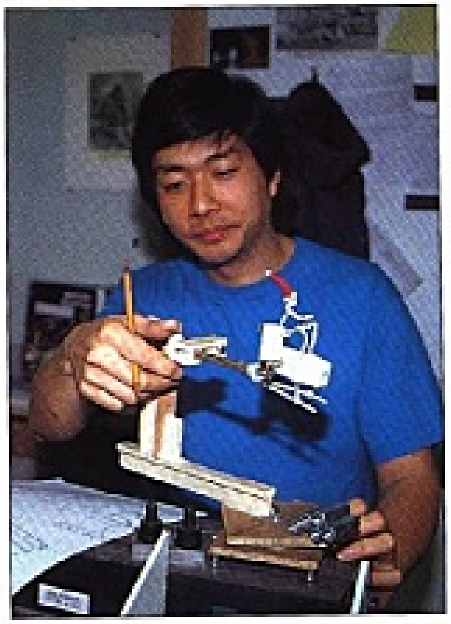
epoxy putty. To create pie pans in volume, one was molded in plastic, and the rest were vacuum-formed from this original. The crust was also sculpted from epoxy putty, then a mold was made so that multiples would be available.

Santa's long "naughty-or-nice" list looks like paper, but that would be impractical in stop-motion animation, where nothing can move even slightly between shots. Instead, Romanauski sandwiched a sheet of aluminum foil between two very thin sheets of paper. The list looks like paper, but it remains flexible and stays exactly where the animator wants it.

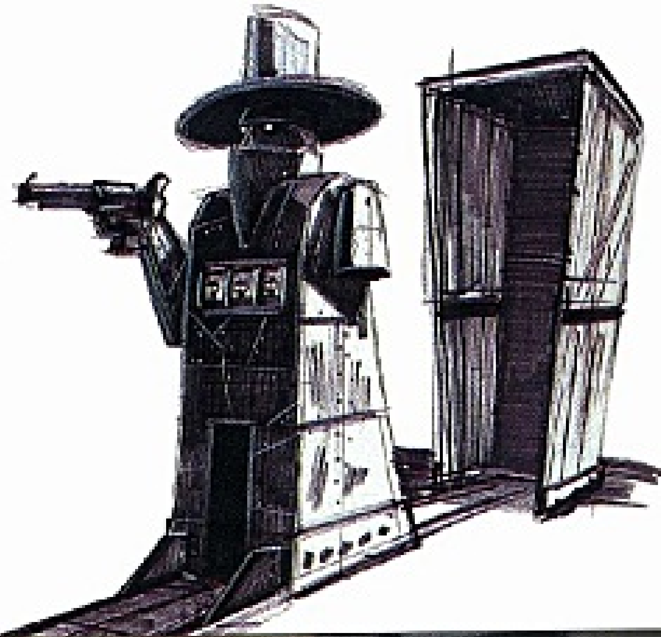
Again and again Romanauski is challenged by the task of making sure the props are both beautiful and durable. "A lot of the props are spidery, tall, thin kinds of things," Romanauski explains. "They're beautiful, but they may not be practical. We have to make sure they're animator-proof. If Santa is sitting on a chair with toothpick-sized legs, it's obviously not going to last very long."

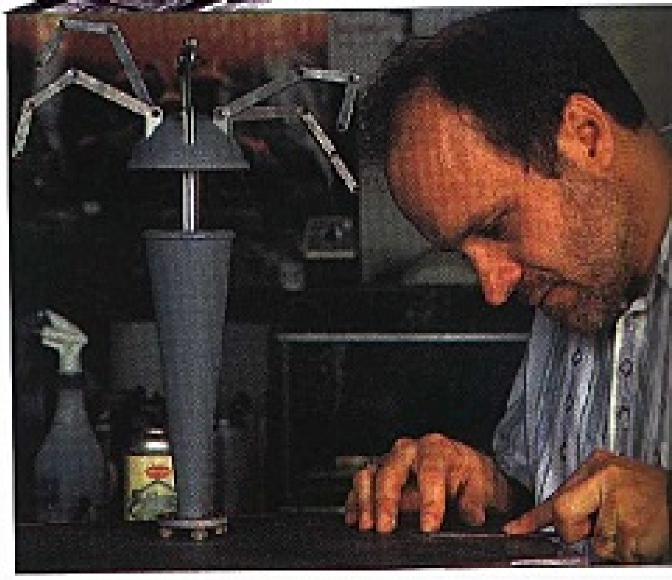
Romanauski relishes some of the really odd props that *Nightmare* has given him the chance to make. "In one proposed scene, the Evil Scientist is disappointed in his creation, Sally," notes Romanauski. "He decides that he wants a new creation, one that works better. He uses a machine that's a kind of head selecter. It's a spider machine with eight legs, and on the end of each one is a cup that holds a skull. It rotates and drops a skull into position. It's a weird rig."

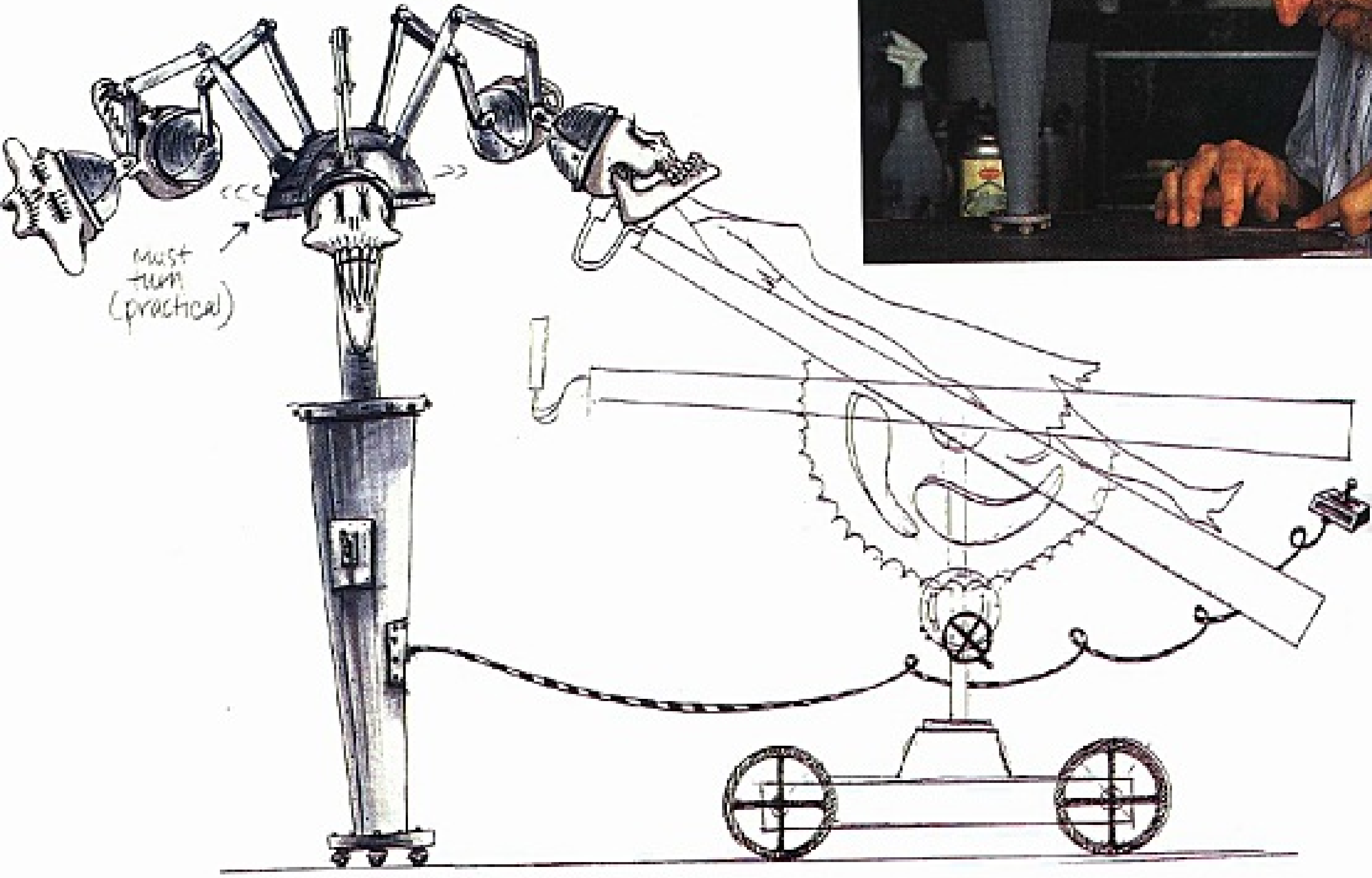
While Romanauski and crew dress the sets, other details—particularly for exterior scenes—are provided by painter B. J. Fredrickson and her crew. "They are responsible for the textural finishes that are applied to these surfaces," Bo Henry explains. "For example, they have painted



The size of the set varies greatly depending on the shot. Animator Angie Glocka (top left) works on a shallow stage for the view of Santa ticking off names on his "naughty-or-nice" list (top right). For shots of Jack traveling in the sky, George Wong (above) works on a rigging system that will hold the sleigh steady yet allow it to be moved.






Must turn (practical)
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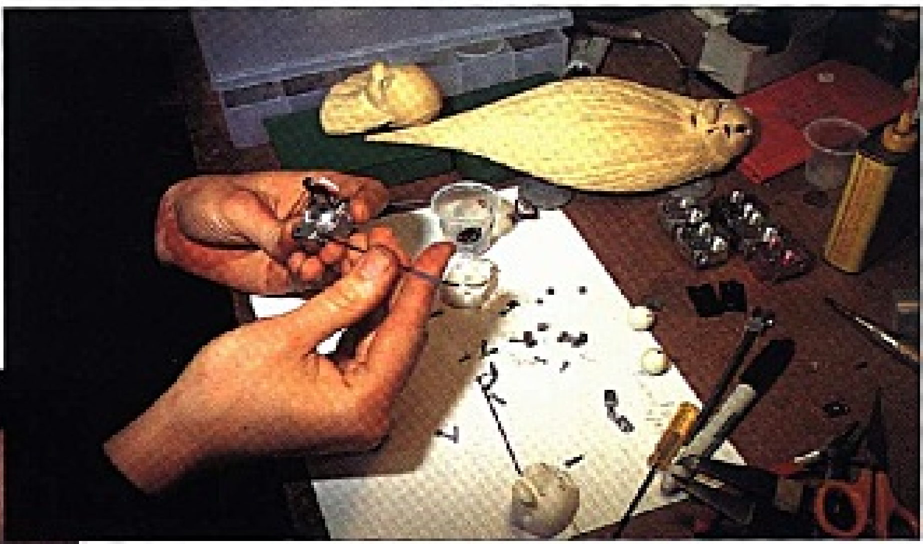
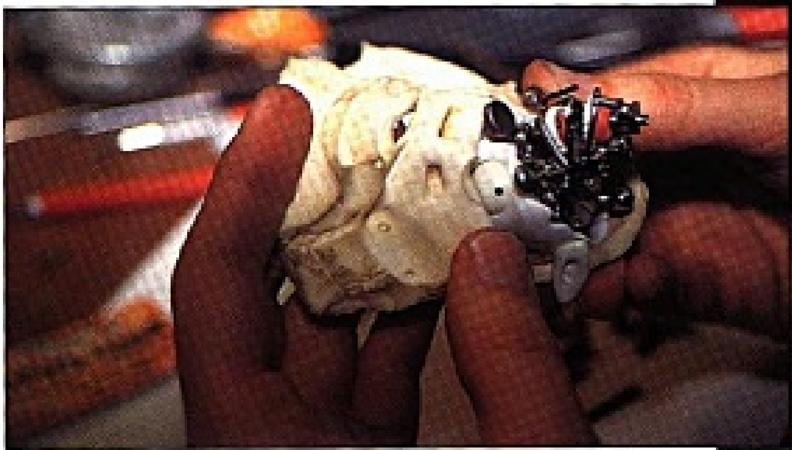
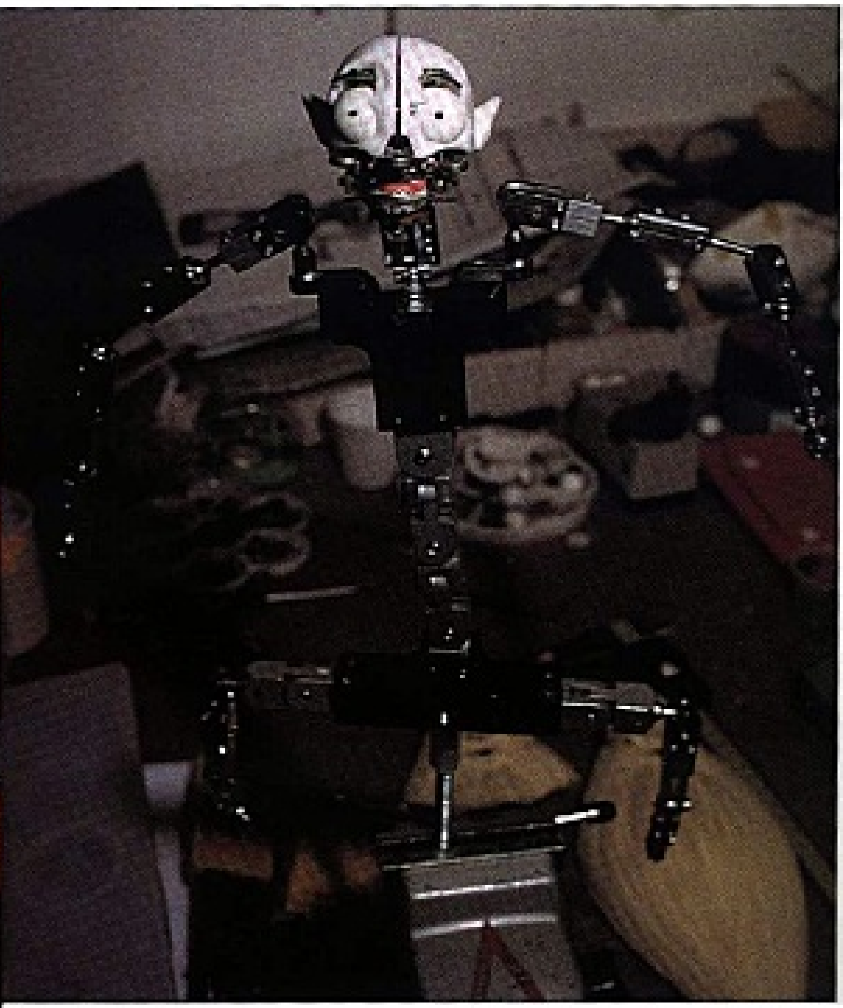
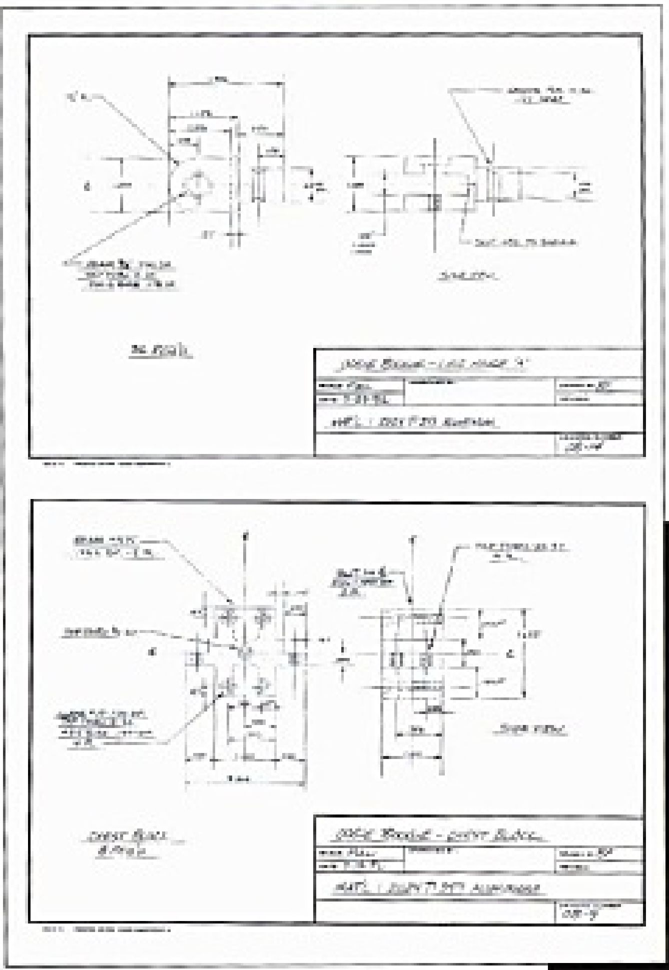
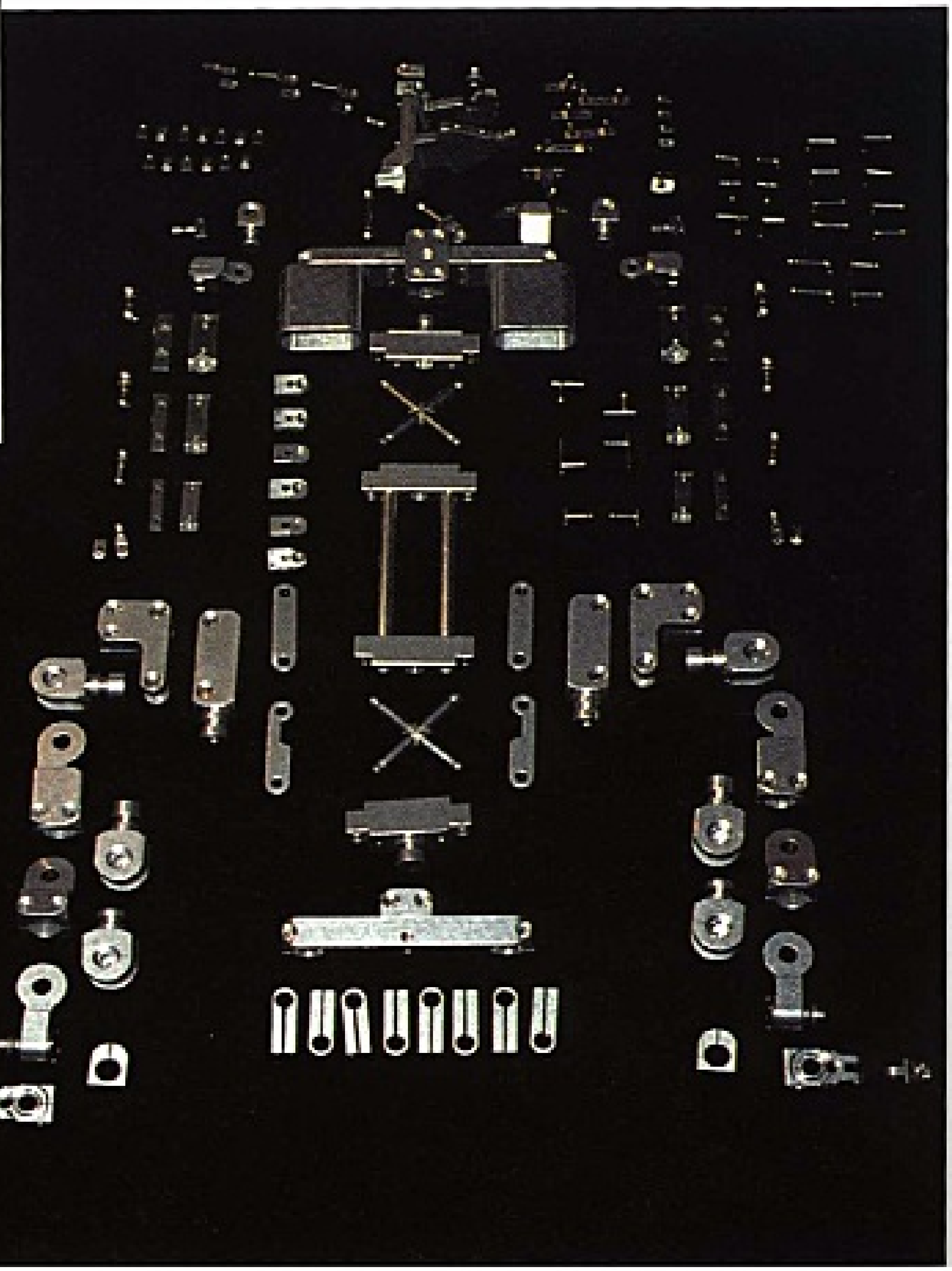
The armature for Santa's head has about fifty tiny parts that must be fitted together precisely (right) to give him a range of facial expressions, with eye, mouth, and even eyebrow movements. Before the full armature is assembled (below right), the joints are tightened and the head's fit is checked inside the foam face (below).



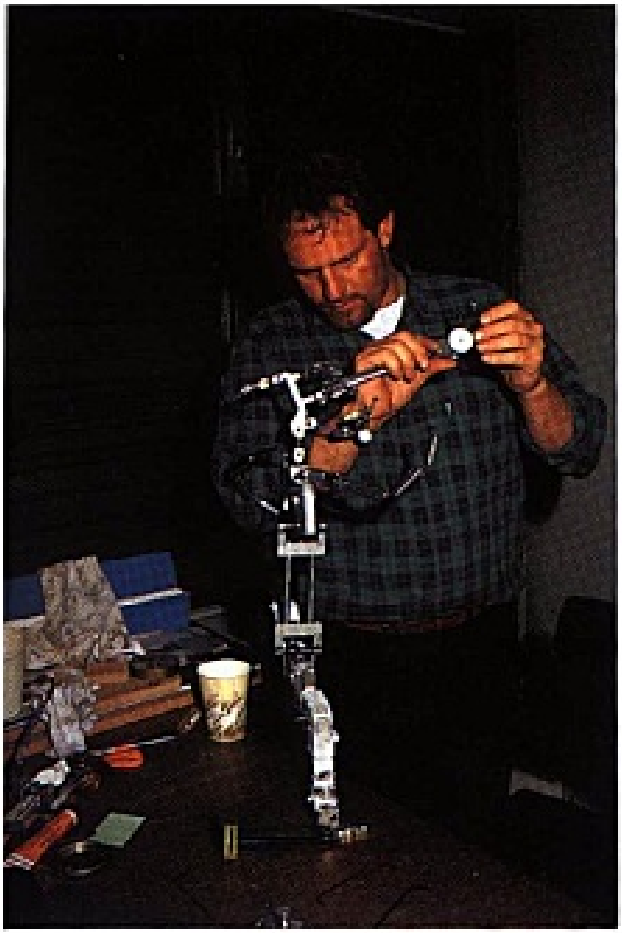


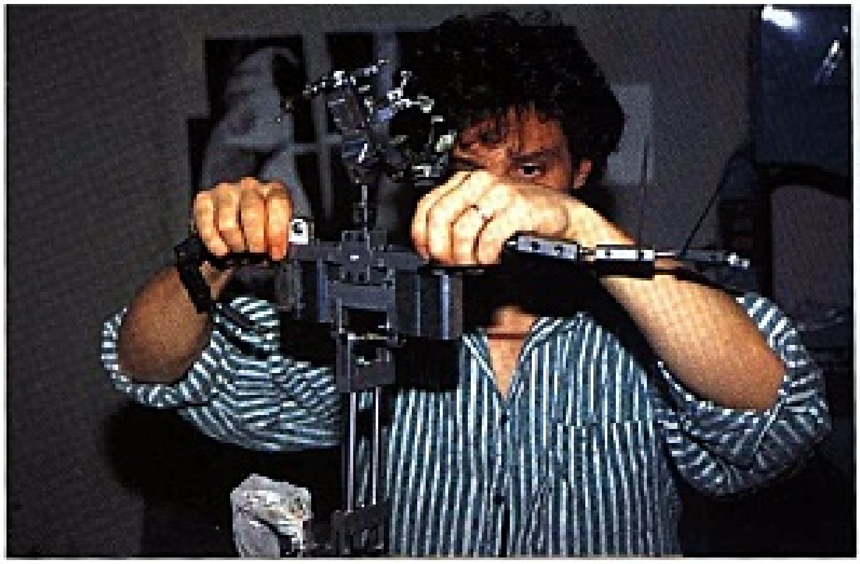


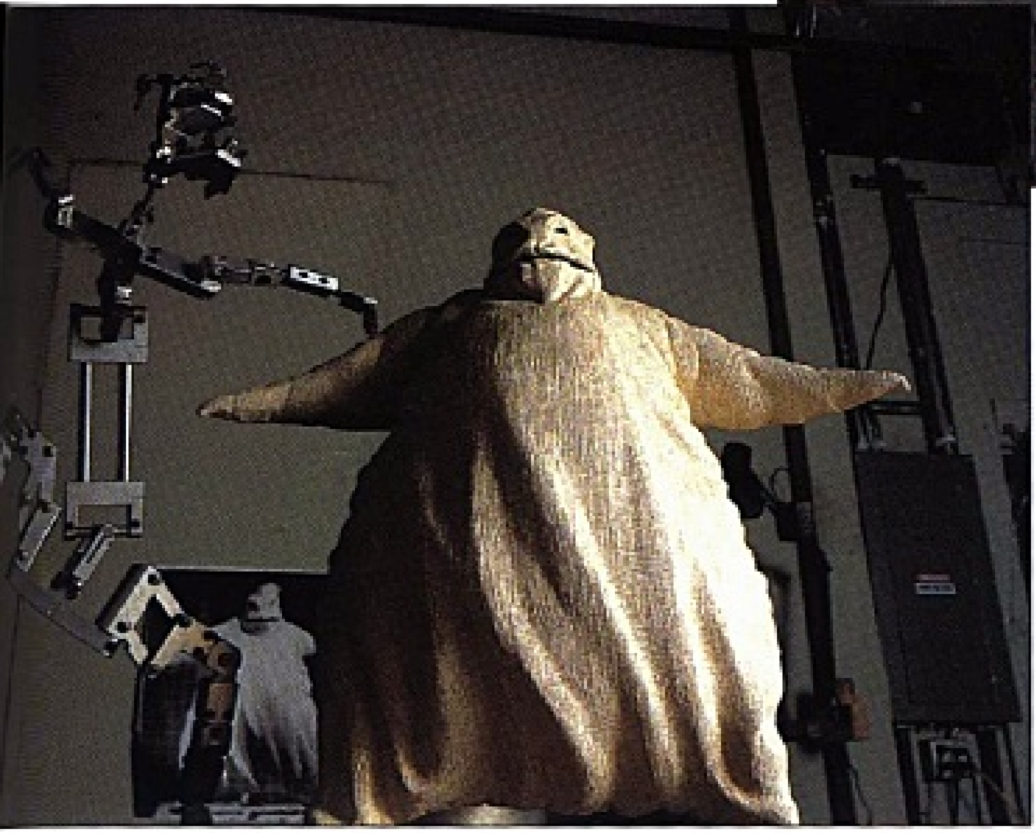




To figure out the armature for Oogie Boogie, Blair Clark first traced the puppet's outline from a gridded photo of the sculpture (top right) and drew possible joints inside. Then he worked out detailed plans with accurate dimensions (above) for every part in Oogie's skeleton, so that exact multiples could easily be made. The 175 or so parts in this two-foot-high puppet must all be fitted together with screws and washers in the correct order (see photo at right).







Blair Clark (above) begins assembling the armature for Oogie, which takes over a day to put together once all the parts are made. During assembly Chris Rand (top left) checks on the armature's alignment; later, animator Eric Leighton (top right) tests the armature's flexibility, tightening or loosening joints as needed. It is a feat of careful design that this six-pound armature can balance on one leg (see left).

maker Blair Clark. "The designers usually give us a sculpture or, better yet, a full-scale sketch of the front and side views. And they tell us what it has to do. There are a lot of characters in this show that have to do a lot of strange things."

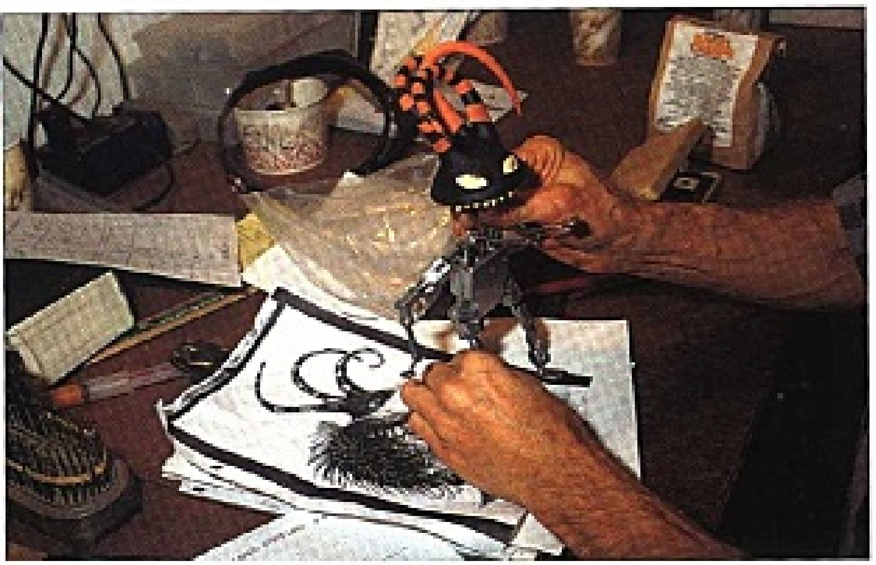
The main requirement for an armature is that it must be able to hold whatever pose the character is put in without falling over or moving. In addition, every movement must be smooth, without any "pops," or sudden jumps. "You want to make the puppet as easy to animate as possible," indicates Clark.

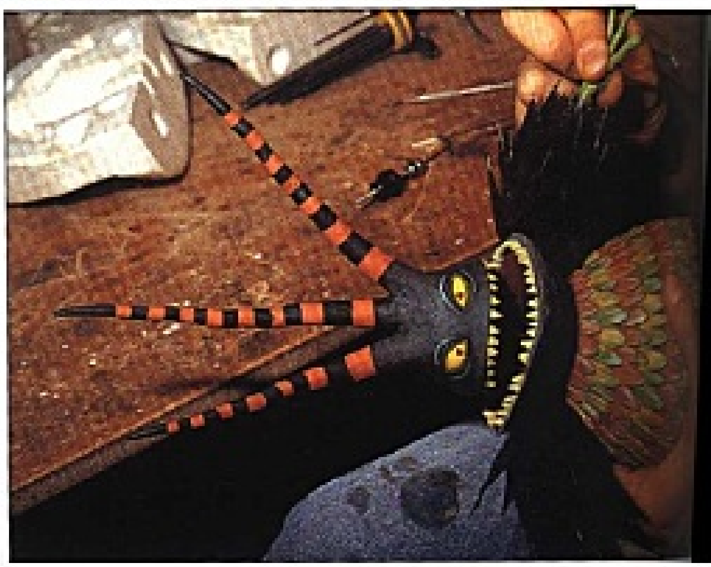
After detailed blueprints are drawn up, the machine shop makes the joints and parts needed to build high-tech, movable skeletons. Multiple copies are made of some of the most-used joints so that the armature department can use them like incredibly intricate and expensive Tinkertoys. These joints are silver-soldered and chrome-plated. This step is necessary, explains Clark, because the armature is eventually covered with a readily oxidizing foam and the whole thing is baked in an oven. "The armature would rust if it wasn't plated," he says.

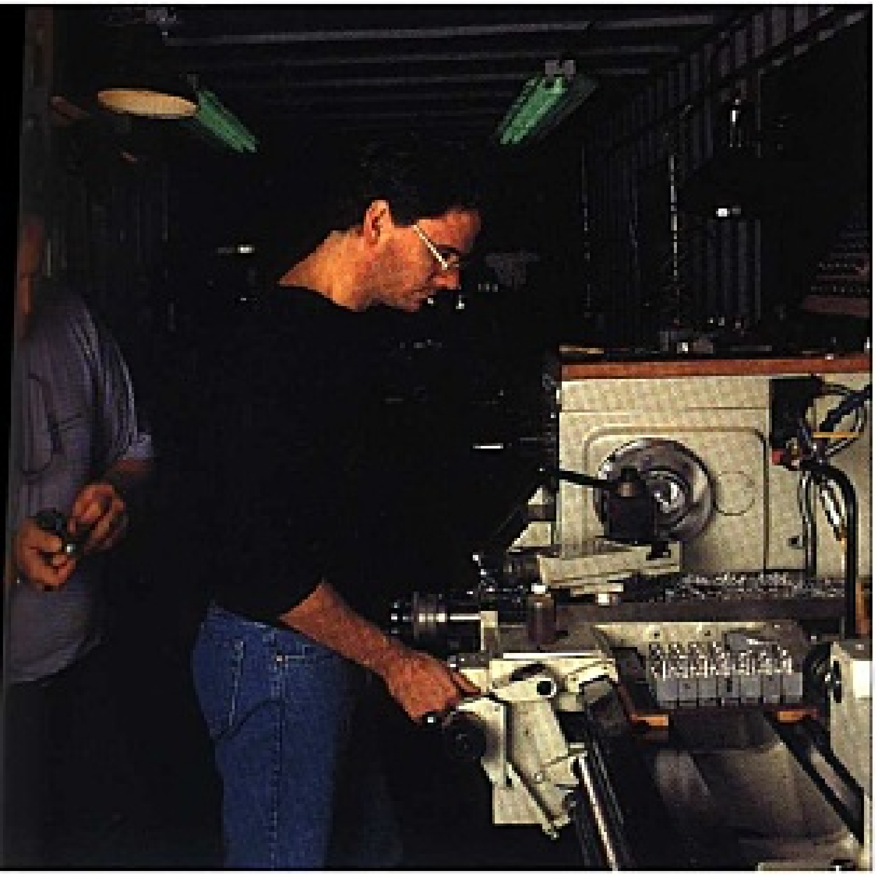
Most of the armatures were designed by Tom St. Amand—"the best in the business," according to Clark. St. Amand faced unusual challenges with the *Nightmare* armatures, especially in building Jack's skeleton. Director Henry Selick has nothing but praise for St. Amand's work: "He was able to make the smallest ankles, the smallest feet that were still able to support Jack's height. Any lesser armature maker would not have been able to pull it off; Jack would have been much thicker, much clunkier-looking."

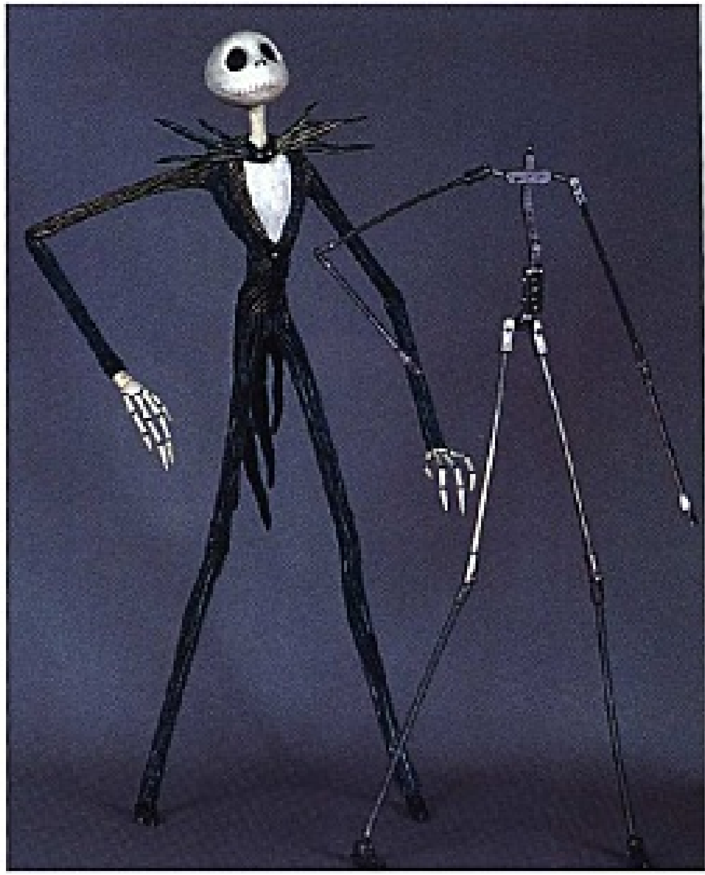
Oogie Boogie presented almost the opposite type of challenge. "He's

The character design shows only the outside of a puppet like the Harlequin Demon (below). It is the armature maker who figures out how to make the head bobble on top of the mouth. When the armature is used, the joints gets loosened, so it is constantly sent back for retightening (below right).









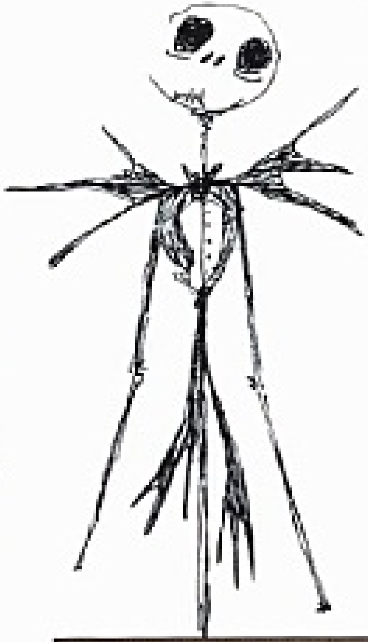
so big," exclaims Clark, "one of the biggest armatures I've ever seen." And big means strong. In the words of sculptor Norm DeCarlo, "You could tow a truck with Oogie's armature."

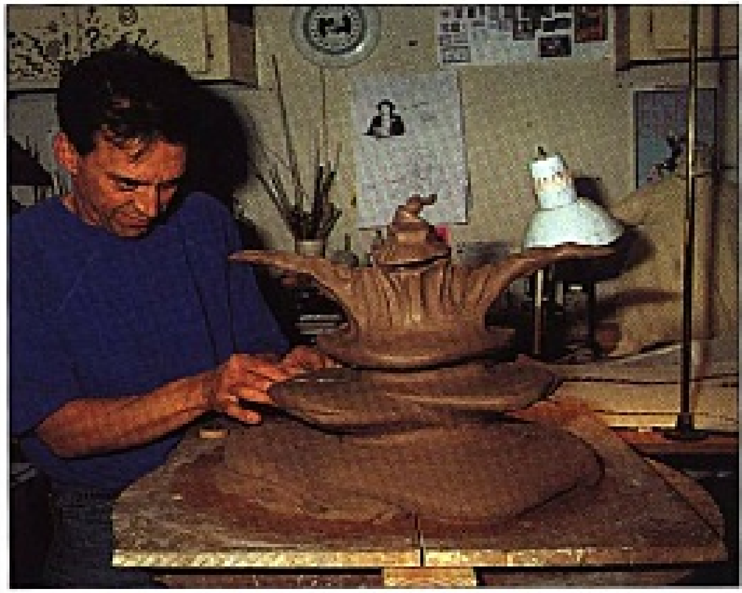
At the same time Oogie had to be able to slink and slide for his dance around Santa Claus. To get Oogie to undulate in this way, Clark made "pushers" (little metal rods with blunted ends).

Because of the methodical nature of stop-motion animation, the same character has to be on several stages at once. This means that duplicate armatures have to be constructed—often with minute differences. "We made a total of eight Jacks," says Clark. "Most were regular size, but Merrick Cheney, another armature maker, also built a half-scale size, which worked out well for a long shot."

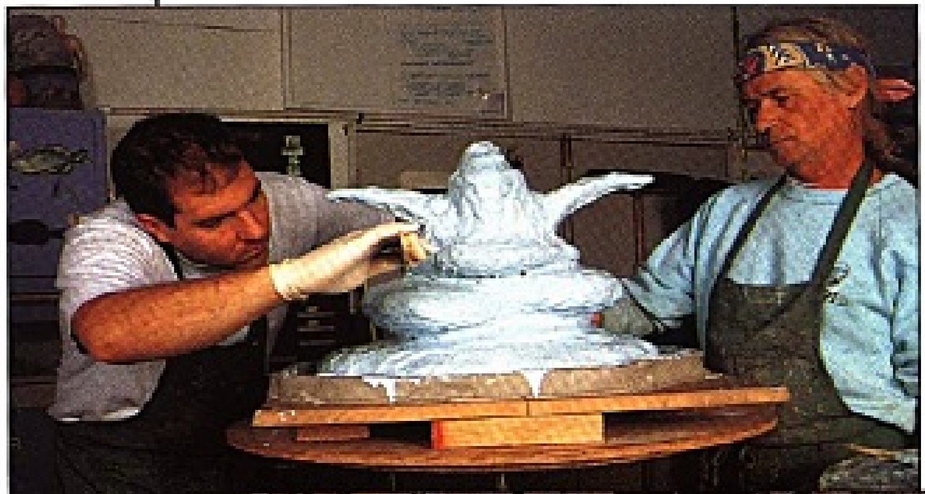
During production, the armature department fluctuated in size. Its members—Clark, Cheney, St. Amand, Chris Rand, Eben Stromquist, Bart Trickel, and Lionel Orozco—not only built new armatures but also serviced those which were already in use. "Over a hundred armatures were made for this show," marvels Clark, not quite believing it himself. "I worked on *Robocop II* and we had nine armatures for the bad guy and four for Robocop and that was a big show. This is just insane!"

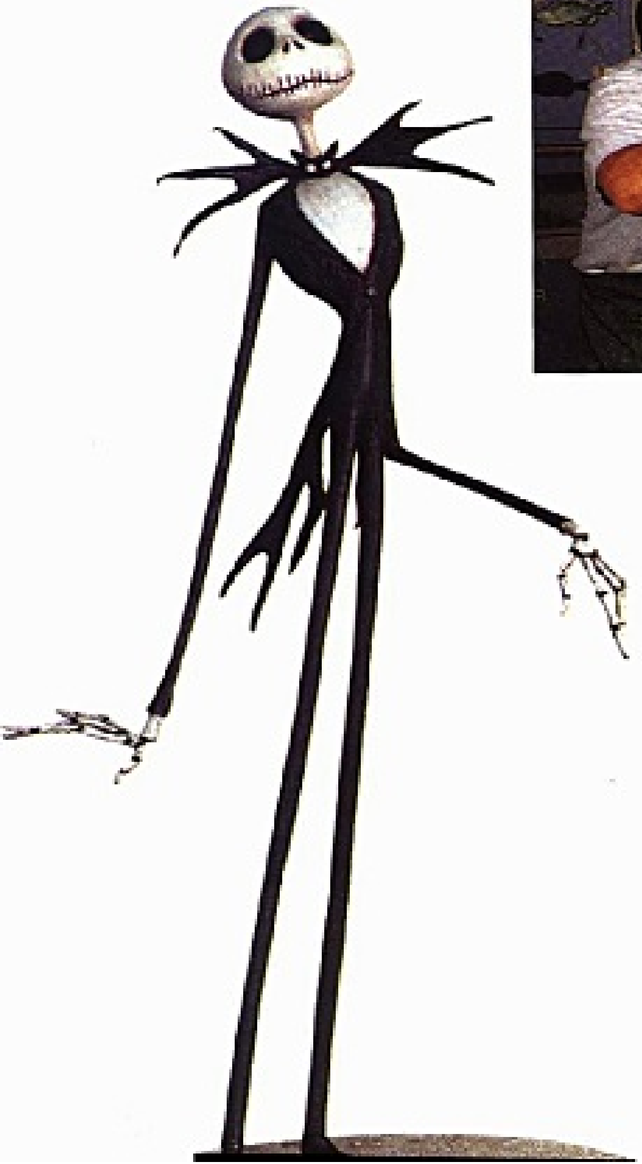
Chris Rand (top left) measures parts with a micrometer to find out exactly how much to machine off the metal, while Blair Clark turns the lathe. The armature for Jack (top right) is amazingly thin, and the puppet is not much thicker. Unlike Santa and Oogie, Jack does not have an armatured "skull"; instead, he has plastic replacement heads.

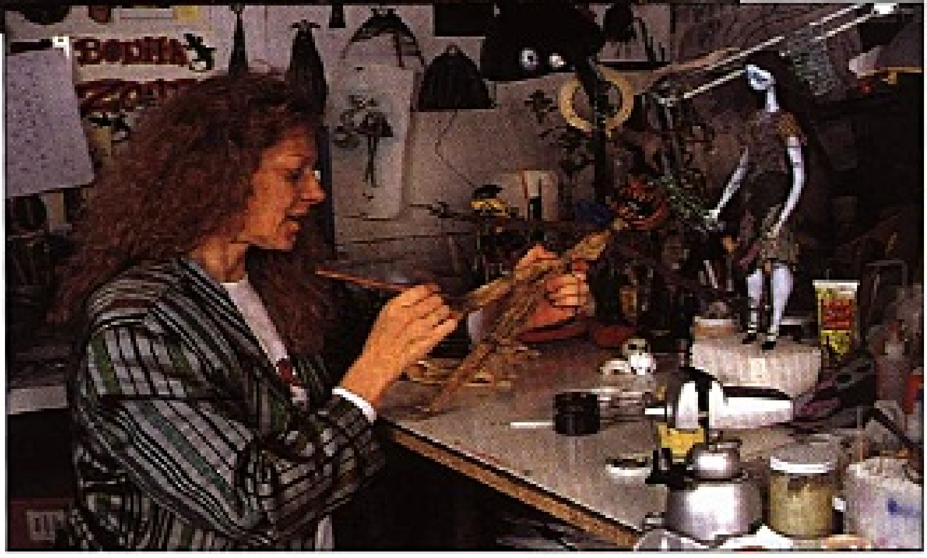


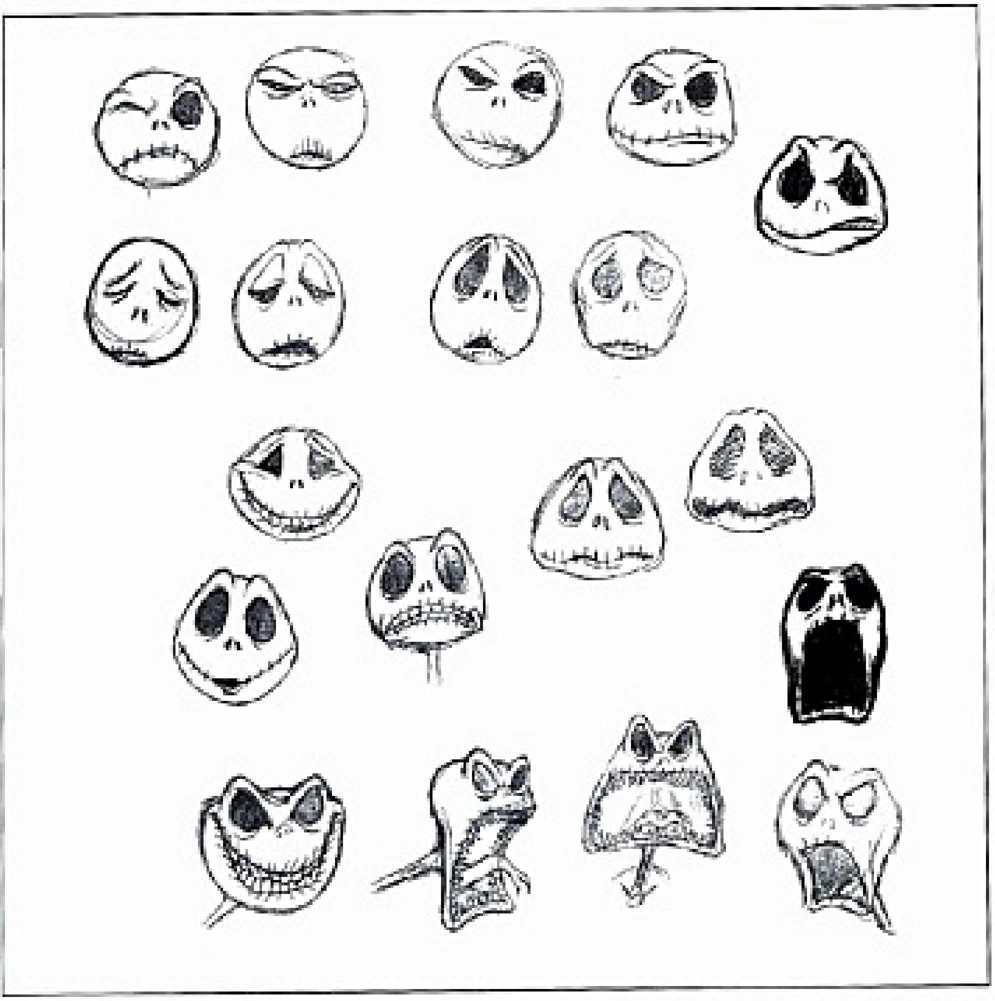


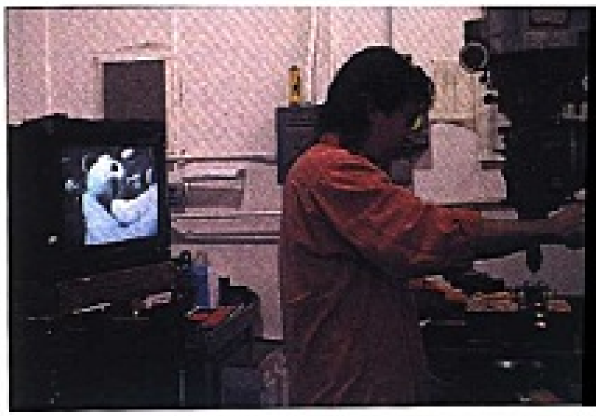
The puppet for Jack (below) closely matches Tim Burton's drawing (right). At first, though, Jack appears as a scarecrow (the puppet Bonita DeCarlo is painting at bottom right). Oogie also derives from Burton's sketches, but he underwent some changes. Here Norm DeCarlo (far right) sculpts Oogie deflating and Mike Grivett and Willem Van Thillo (right, left and right) work on a foam cast of this, for a shot that was later cut from the film.









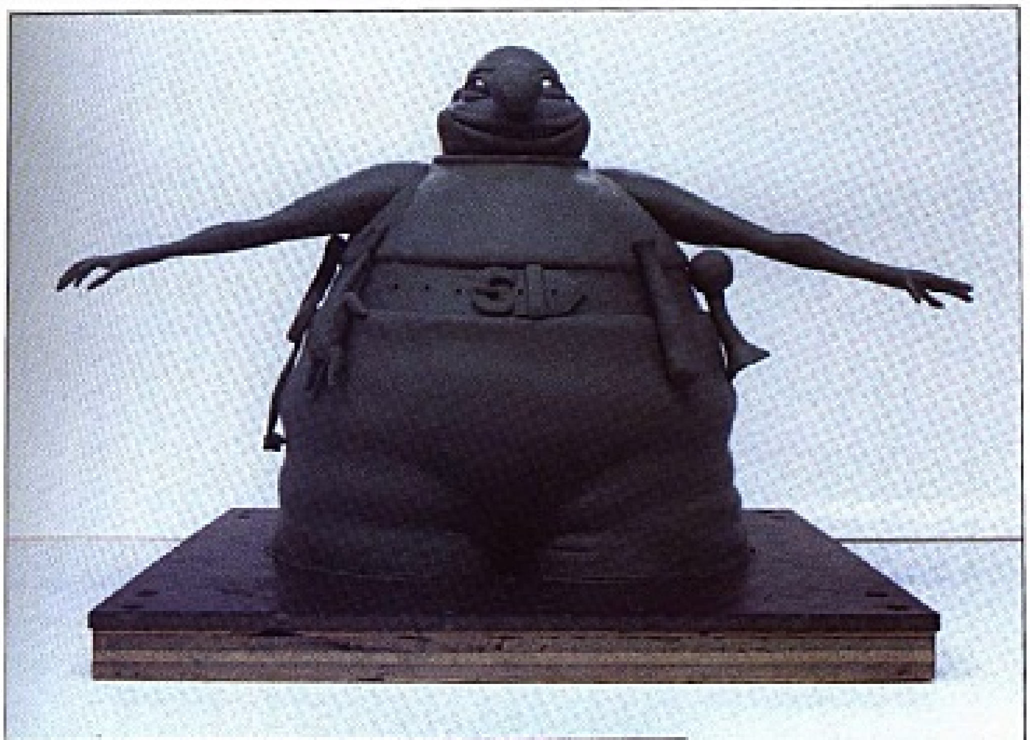


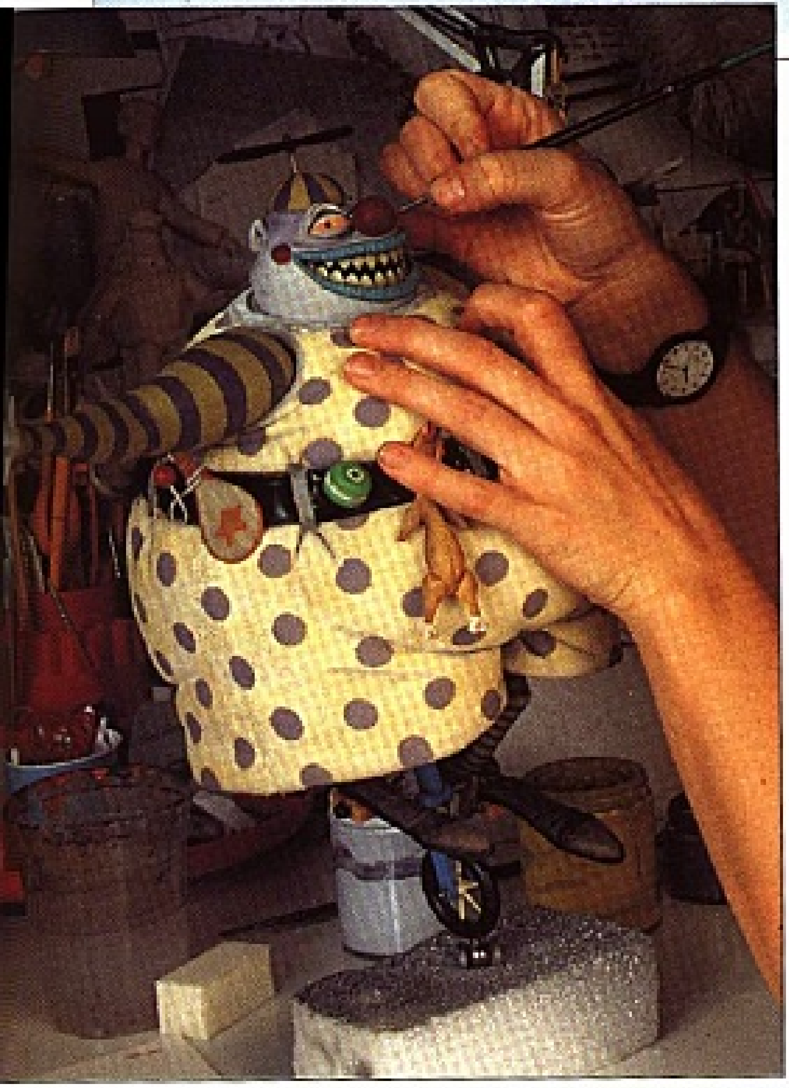
CHARACTER SCULPTING AND FABRICATION

The character department is the next logical step after armatures. They create the flesh that goes on the bones. But things are rarely that orderly on a stop-motion film. For John Reed, the mold-making supervisor, the ideal sequence would be for a puppet to be designed, the actions planned, and an armature made. The character would be sculpted over the armature, then molded, cast, and painted. The animator would animate it, the film would be developed, and the movie shown. "In reality," Reed admits, "it doesn't work that way at all. All these steps have to happen more or less simultaneously. If people don't communicate well with each other, then it's like the game of Chinese Whispers, where everybody interprets something differently all the way down the line."

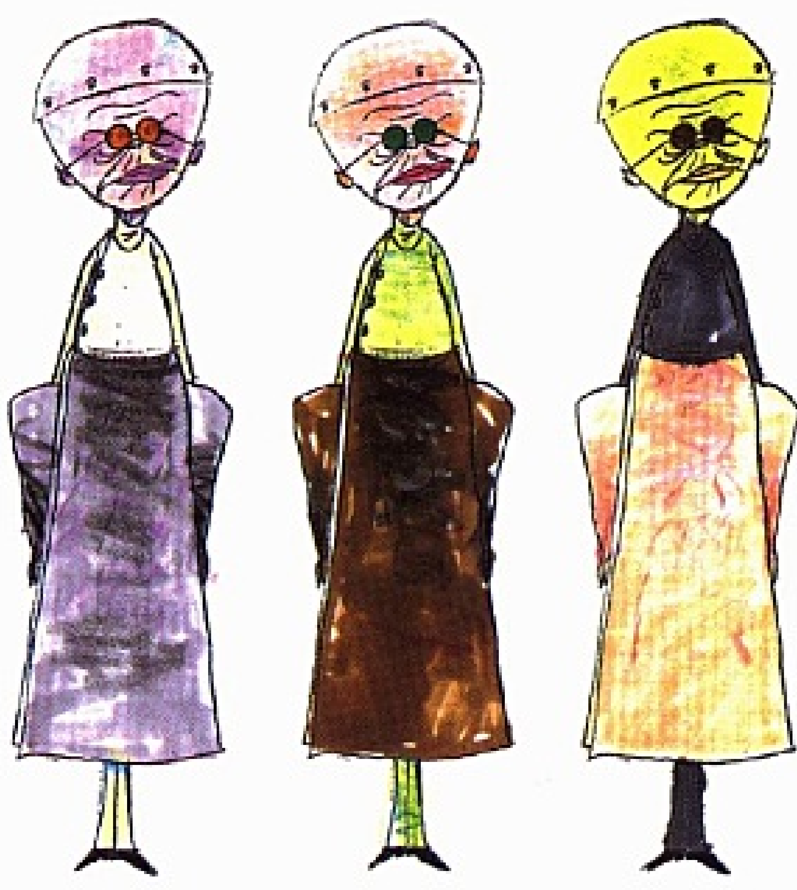
For *Nightmare*'s character designers, the original inspiration and the biggest challenge came from the same source: Tim Burton. The drawings he had made at Disney were highly evocative: spooky, funny, creepy, weird—wondrously imaginative. But when it came to translating his drawings into real, three-dimensional characters, there was sometimes trouble.

Jack's expressions range from downcast to delighted to furious. To capture the variety of emotions in the drawing (top left), as well as the lip movements for his speaking and singing, Jack is outfitted with about 180 replaceable heads. Shelley Daniels (top right) sculpts the stitches and slight variations in one of the mouths. The process is repeated for each head, before multiples are cast. For Jack's appearance as Santa, Jeff Brewer (above) drills holes to hold the beard in the same place on all the heads.

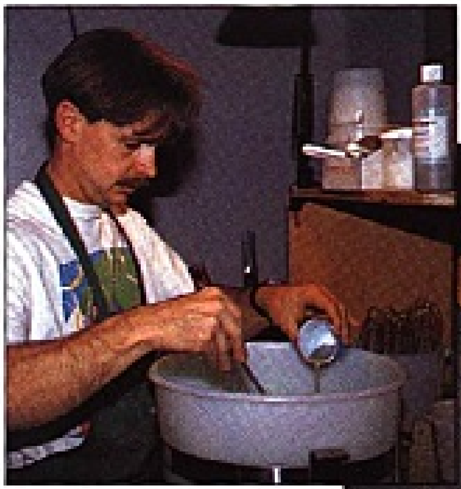


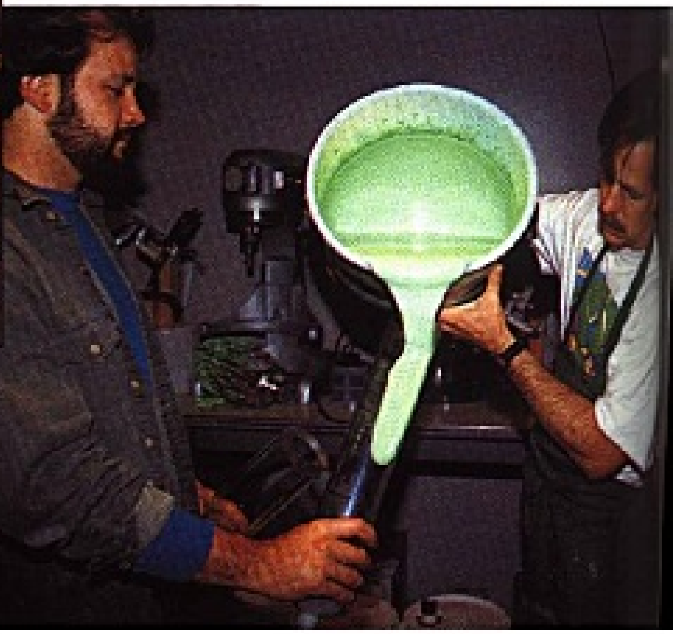


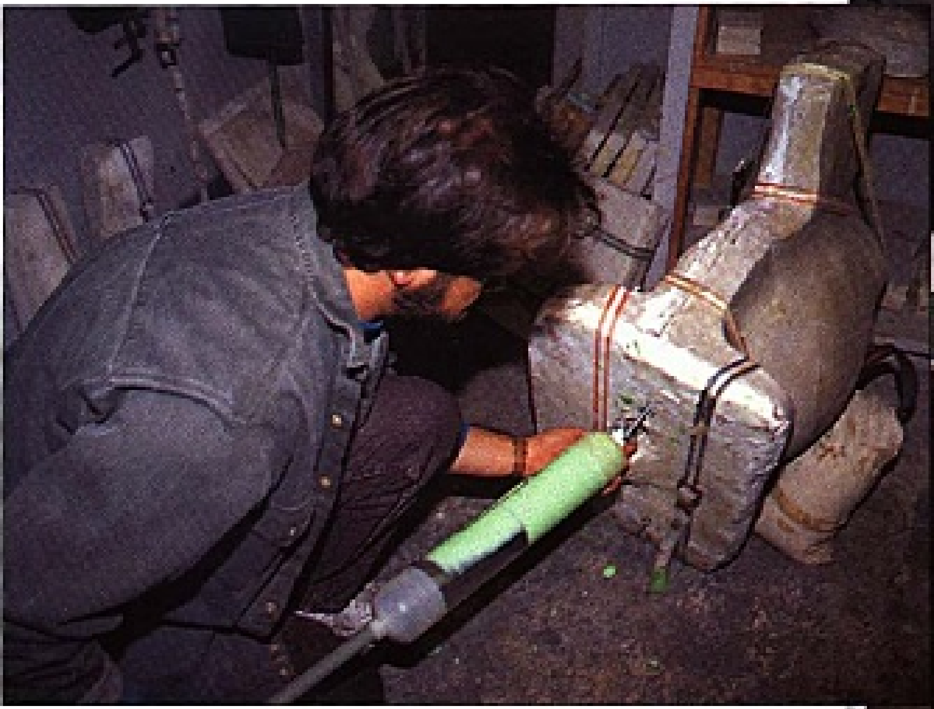
Working from the character design, the sculptor makes a clay model (like the early version of the Clown at left), which is used to make a mold for the puppet, allowing multiples to be cast. For the Evil Scientist, the color studies (below) were done for a standing figure, although the puppet was confined to a wheelchair.

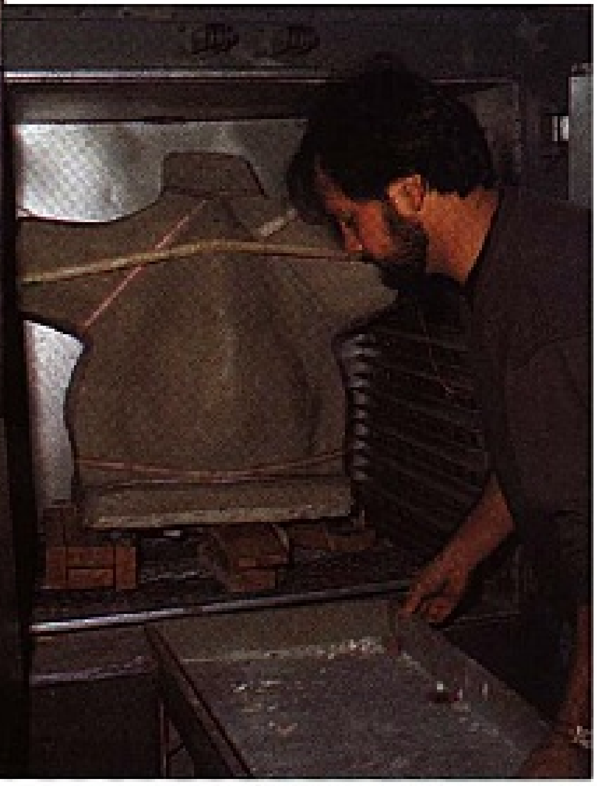


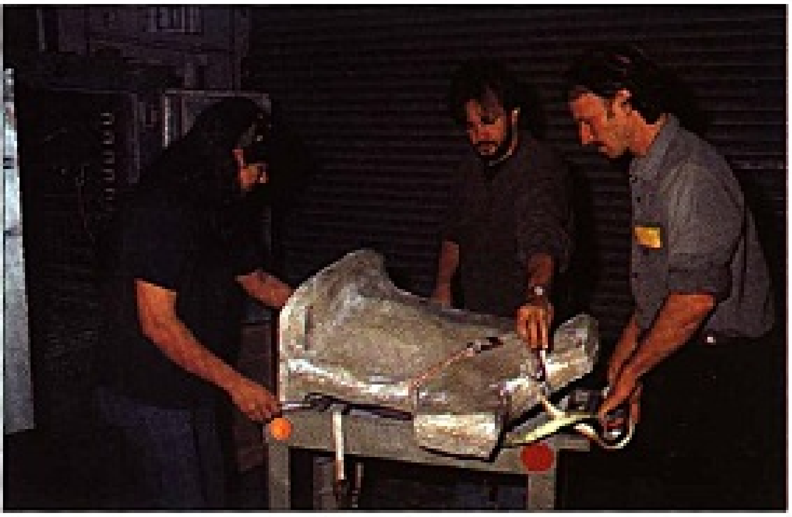
Erik Jensen (right) whips up foam latex colored green for Oogie Boogie's skin in ultraviolet light. When the consistency is right, he adds a coagulant, and with Rob Ronning (far right), pours the mixture into a tube for injection into the mold (below). The foam settles in between an epoxy core and the mold itself. Ronning (below right) puts the mold into the oven, where it bakes for several hours to vulcanize the rubber. Ronning, Tony Preciado , and John Reed (bottom) are all needed to open the 200-pound mold.

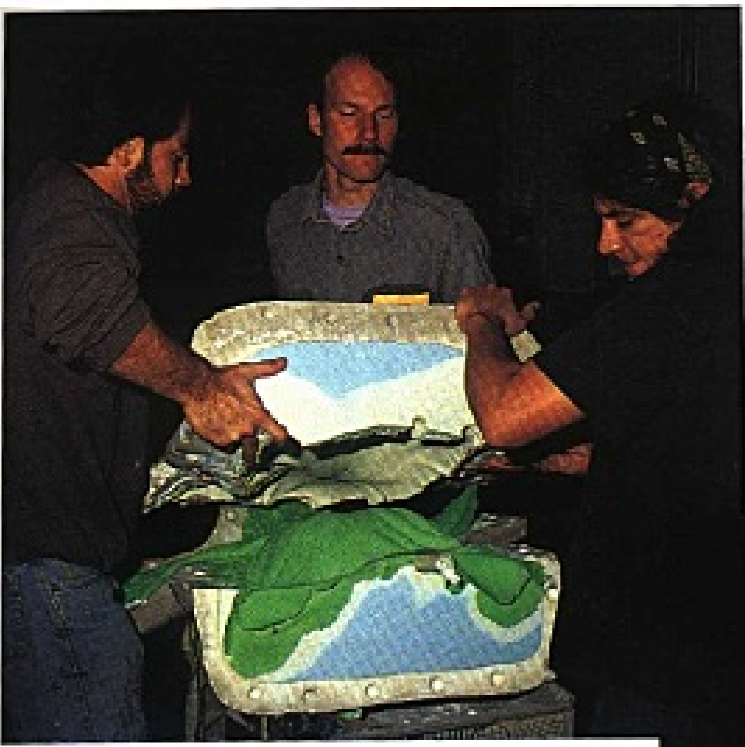












After carefully prying off the top of the mold (left), Ronning, Reed, and Preciado coat the foam with talcum powder (below) and then ease the cast out of the mold (below left). It is then brushed once more with powder to keep the latex from sticking to itself and put into the oven again for an hour or two to dry out.

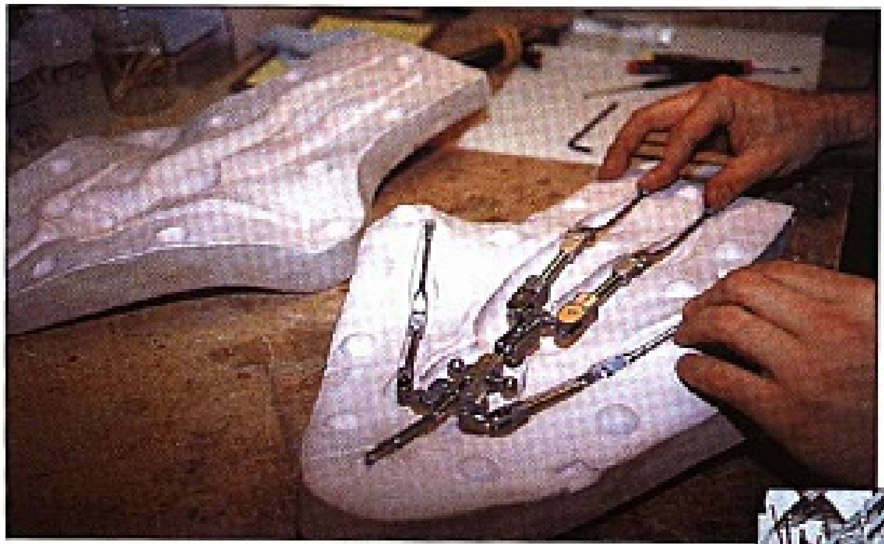
be molded and tested again before I could put all the texture on it. All this was very time-consuming" (and in the end the shot was cut from the film).

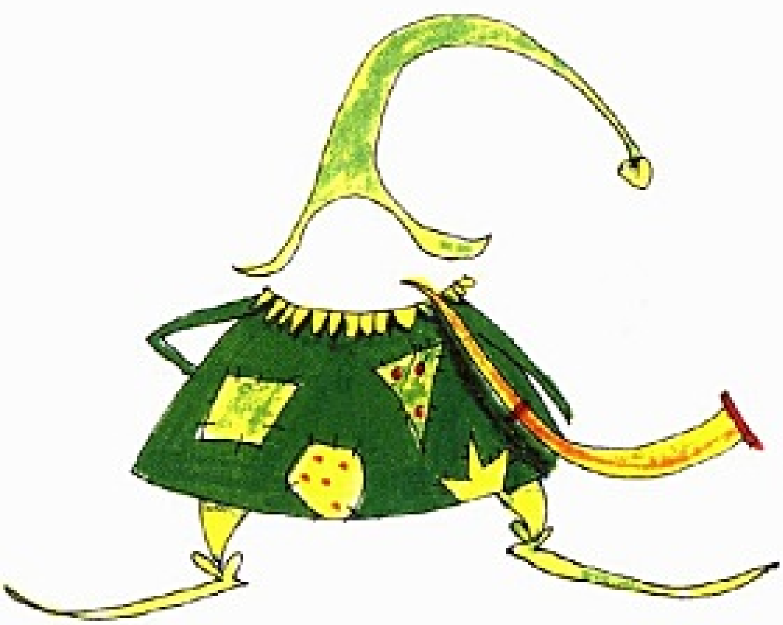
Once the characters have been sculpted, a mold is created so multiple puppets can be cast. The armature is placed in the mold and foam latex is injected, surrounding the armature and filling out the structure inside. The result is a replica of the character with a steel "skeleton" inside.

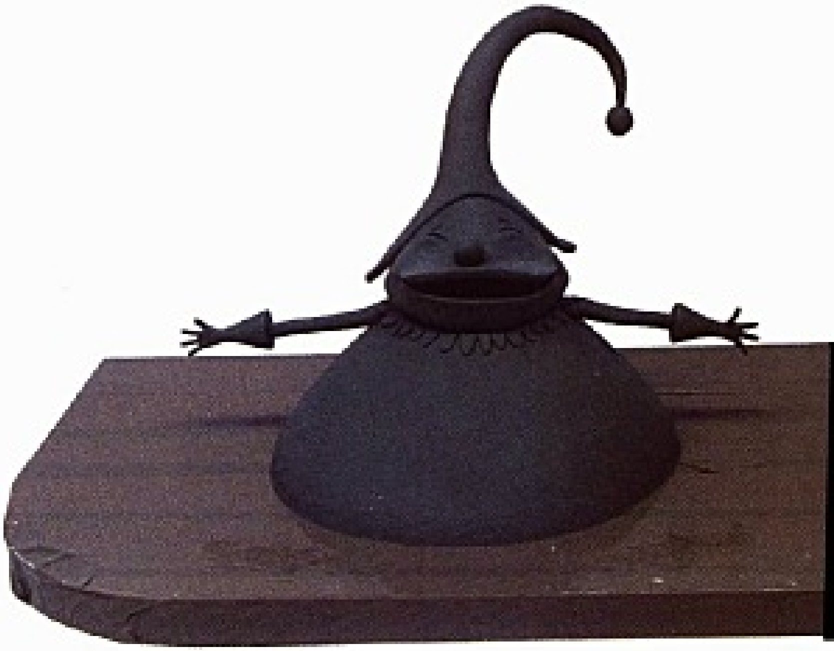
The puppet then moves up to the character fabrication department for its final grooming and dressing. The first step is to remove waste material left over from the casting process and correct imperfections in the foam surface. Called seaming, this requires laying a delicate patch of fine latex over the mold lines and any imperfections. The surface of each puppet is cleaned with alcohol to prepare it for painting. Some puppets are painted with a urethane-based paint that forms a flexible skin on the puppet. Others are treated with a rubber cement and solvent mixture that temporarily opens the surface of the foam, so the pigment adheres firmly.

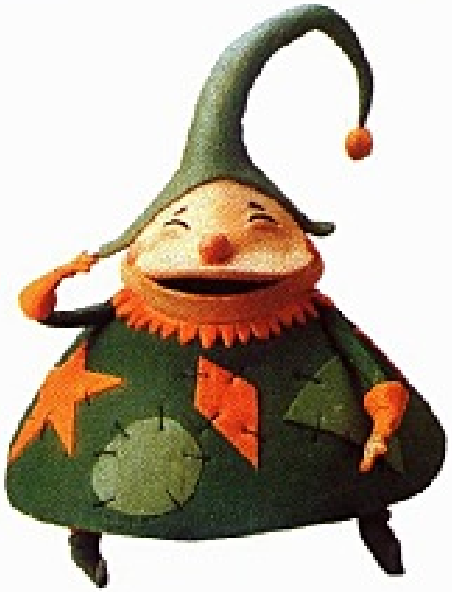
"Our paints have to be very sturdy," emphasizes Bonita DeCarlo,

Sally's armature is put inside the mold (top left), so the foam latex covers it. Her hands (top right) are all cast separately, so they can easily be replaced. When the Sally puppet is first removed from the mold, there is a buildup of foam along the seams—called "flashing"—and this waste material has to be cut off (bottom left). The next step is to take wet latex and seal any imperfections, especially along the seams, as Lauren Vogt is doing with the Behemoth (bottom right).







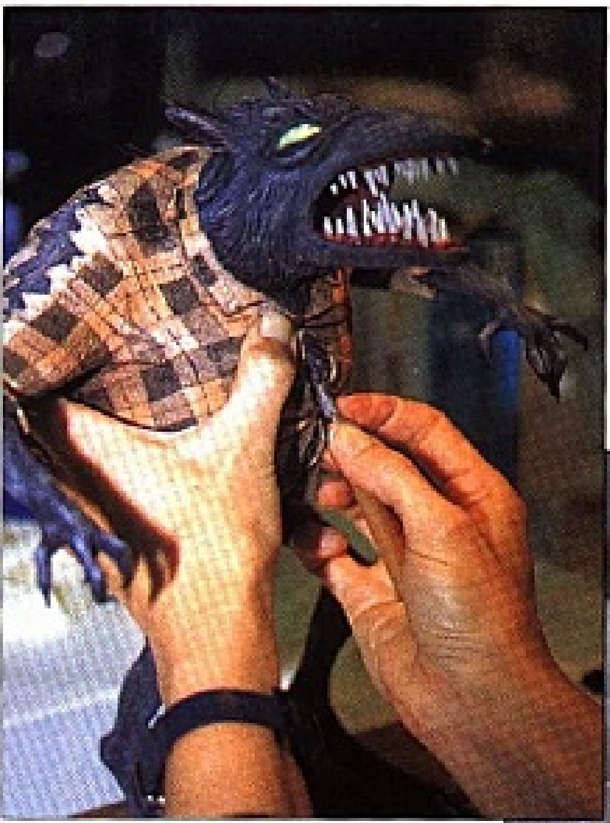


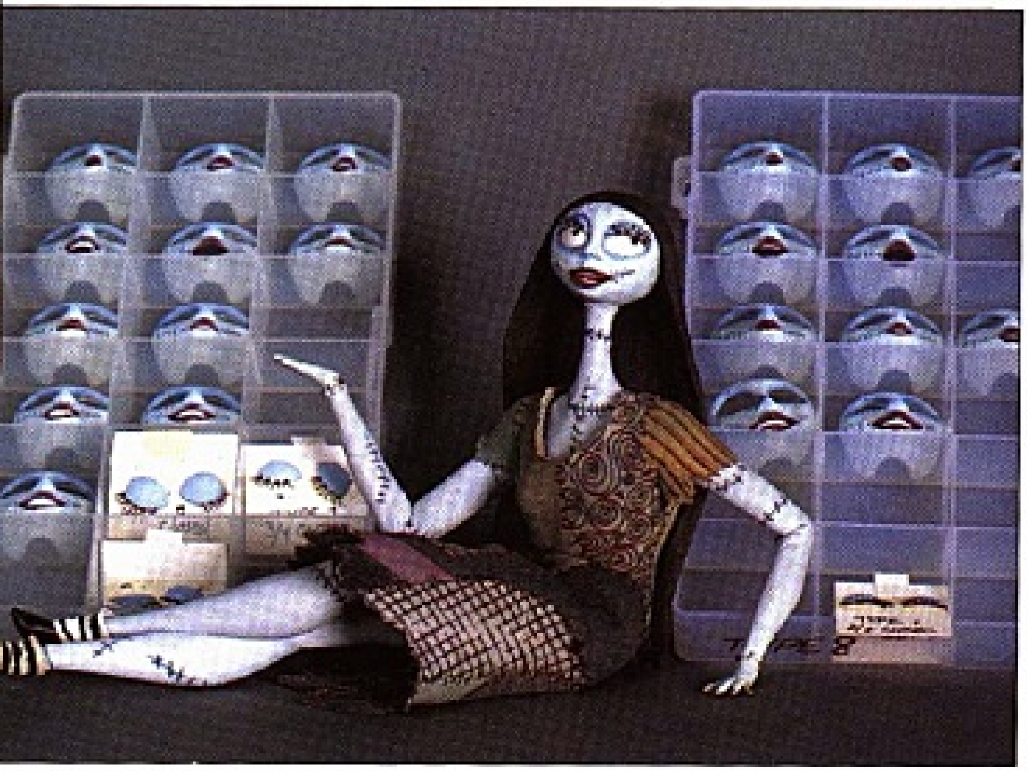
character fabrication supervisor. "The process of animation is very rough on the puppets, so the stronger we make the paint job, the better the puppets will hold up through a number of shots."

The fabricators also use a variety of materials when finishing the characters. They have a large selection of cloth fabrics, natural and synthetic furs, and fabric markers. "We also use pigmented powders," says DeCarlo, "to achieve the graphic look that *Nightmare* strives for."

Some of the *Nightmare* characters have their clothes merely painted on, but the major puppets have their own wardrobes. Yet nothing is precisely what it seems in this stop-motion world. Just because clothes look like they're made of cloth is no reason to assume they are.

Based on the color study (top left) and the "sculpt" (top right), the completed elf (bottom right) is one piece of foam latex (except for the legs), with a wire armature inside. Members of the fabrication department, including Mike Wick, Grace Murphy, and Facundo Rabaudi (bottom left, left to right), are constantly making new puppets and repairing old ones.





Following the plan in front of her, Chrystene Ells (top) stuffs cotton balls into Oogie Boogie, providing padding between the armature and the skin. Later (above right), she adds shadows to Oogie's skin, as Liz Jennings works behind her. Using a needle, Jennings (above) pushes hair into the Wolfman (also called the Werewolf). Sally (right) has over 120 replacement faces.

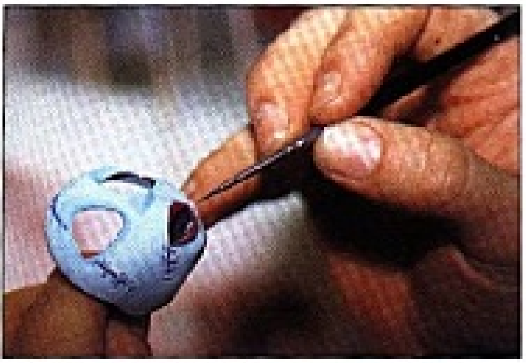
"When it was decided that Sally needed a dress," Bonita DeCarlo mentions, "we had to plan out the stages of the creation of that dress very carefully. The first step was to have a dress sculpted for the puppet's body. That was then molded and cast in foam latex to provide a surface to lay the dress onto. The dress itself is made up of a silkscreened pattern that has been hand-painted, laid onto the foam, and carefully stitched."

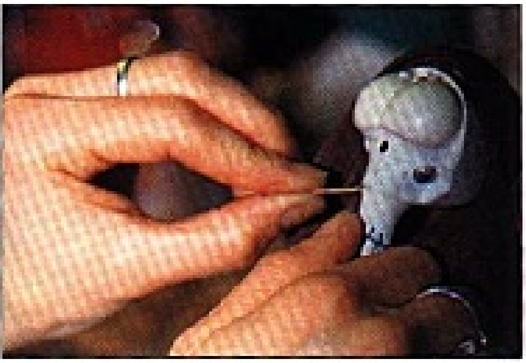
Such incredible care is taken because of the nature of the Sally puppet and her movements. "When Sally walks or lifts her leg," DeCarlo says, "the dress moves with her. It even has a bit of memory. It remembers where it was and falls back into that place so the animator doesn't have to worry about it moving all over her body on the screen."

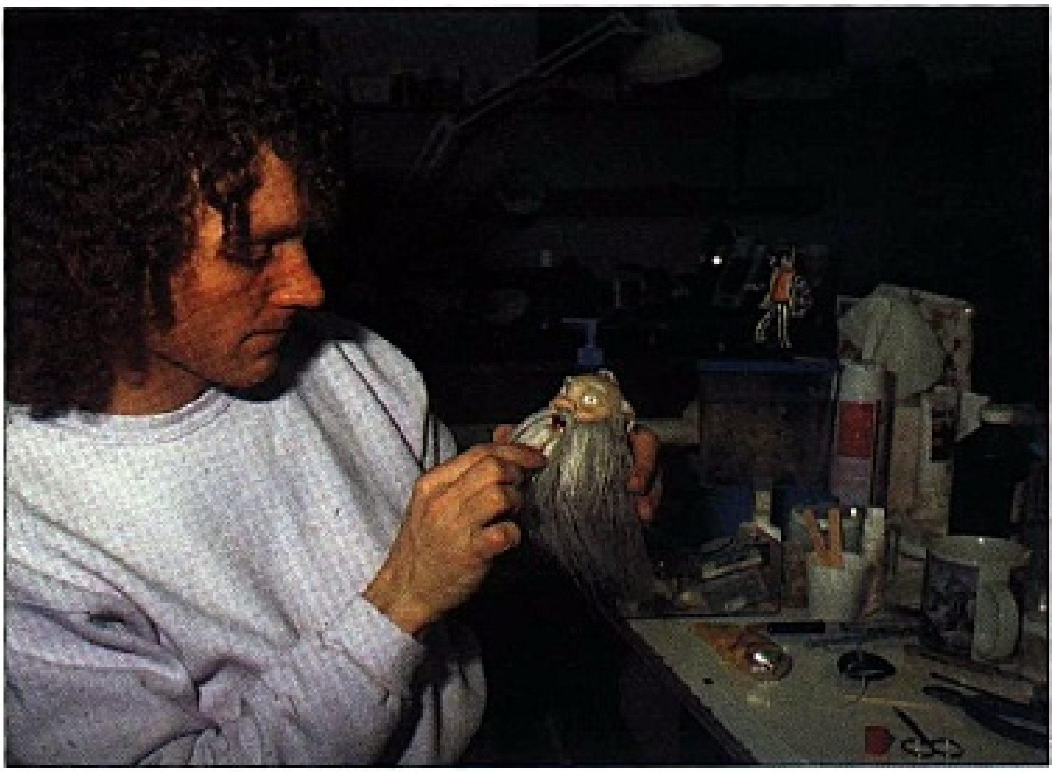
Hair presents a challenge. DeCarlo notes, "Sally's hair is made of foam latex that has been lined with lead so it can be animated precisely. Santa Claus, on the other hand, has a beard made with a wired foam core with fur laid on the top surface. For the Wolfman we used a technique called punching, which requires pushing individual hairs into the surface of the foam with a special needle device. We've used a number of different styles of hair in order to give each puppet a unique look."

While the armature lets a puppet's body and limbs be articulated for human—or inhuman—movements, its face is more difficult to animate. To give Jack and Sally a full range of expression, a series of replacement

T. Reid Norton paints the details on one of Sally's faces (top left), while Elise Robertson tightens a screw on the head that Sally's face pops onto (bottom left). Sally also has separate pupils and eyelashes that the animators can change to increase her range of expression. Using a toothpick, Mike Wick carefully glues strands of hair into Santa's beard (below).







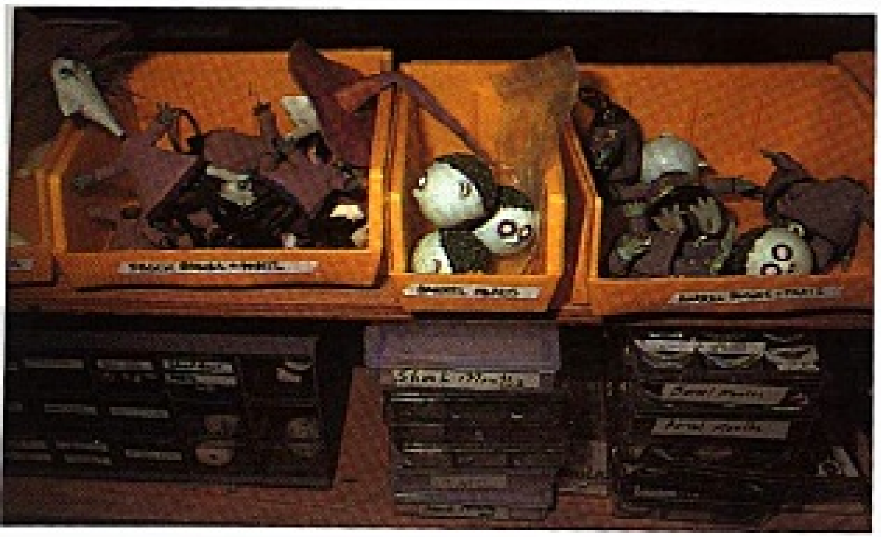
heads was designed. Sally has ten different types of faces, and each type has eleven expressions. "They're like masks," says John Reed. "Her eyes can always be looking in the same direction from frame to frame, but you can pop her face off. There are also lip-synching mouths within each expression so she can enunciate everything she needs to say."

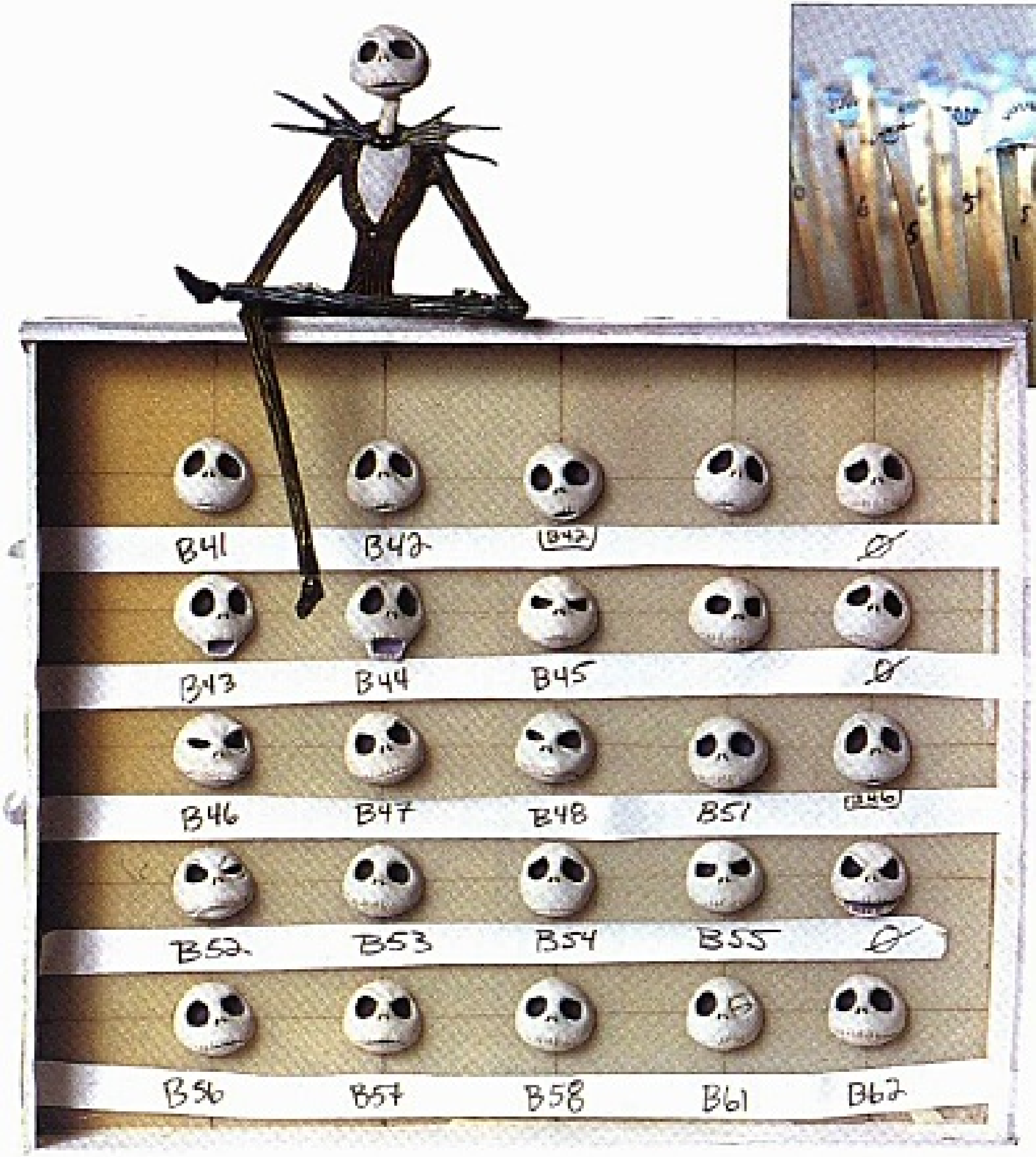
Faces aren't the puppets' only replaceable parts. Bonita DeCarlo indicates, "We keep a ready supply of hands, shoes, even extra castings of arms, which can be quickly exchanged for damaged or broken pieces. We also have replacement eyelids with delicate lashes. We have thousands of those. One person spends a lot of time making sure we never run low."

Fabricating the puppets is only half the job. After each character has finished a shot, it is returned to fabrication to be cleaned. Armatures break, replacement faces chip, foam wears out (particularly around the joints), and fabric tears. Light-colored puppets like Sally or the Evil Scientist get dirty quickly and can be used only for a shot or two before they must be returned to the mold department for recasting.

"There are approximately sixty puppets on the sets every week," notes DeCarlo. "We have to maintain those while prepping the next sixty that will be up the next week. There are 227 puppets in this film. That's a lot of puppets."

To repair a hole in the Evil Scientist's mouth (below), Lauren Vogt improvises, using glue and latex—whatever works. In the storeroom, which is filled with puppets taking a rest in between performances, Tim Burton (right) poses with the stars of the show—Jack and Sally.

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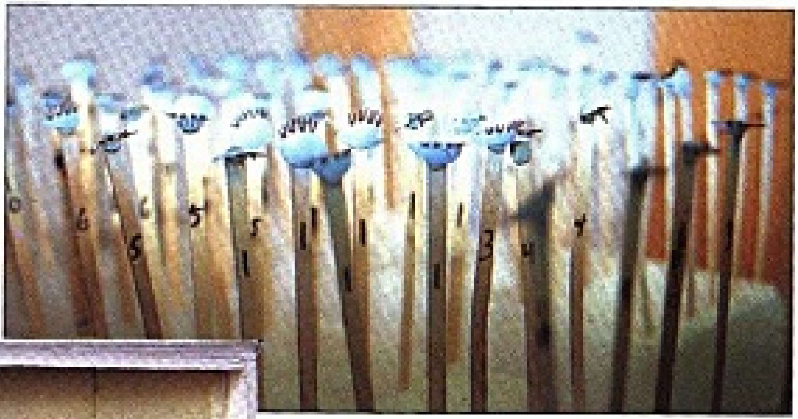
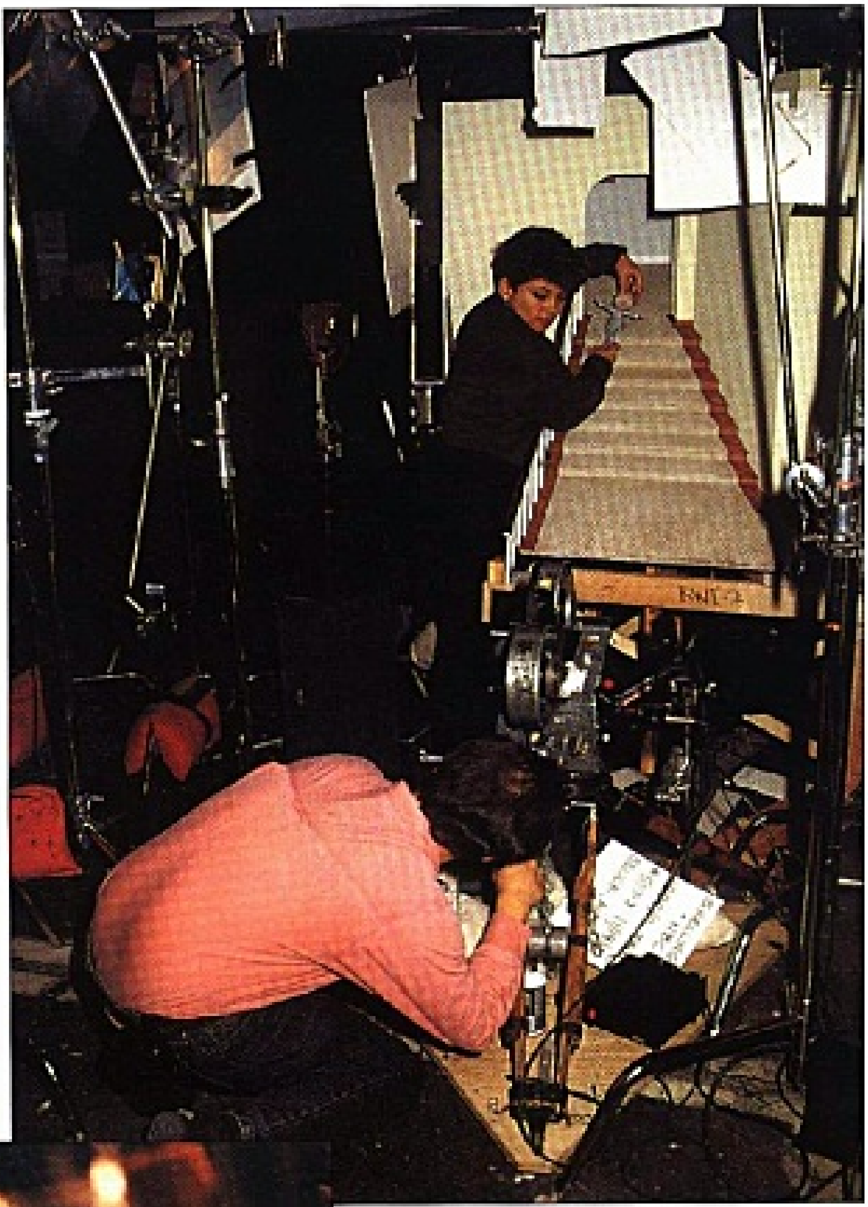
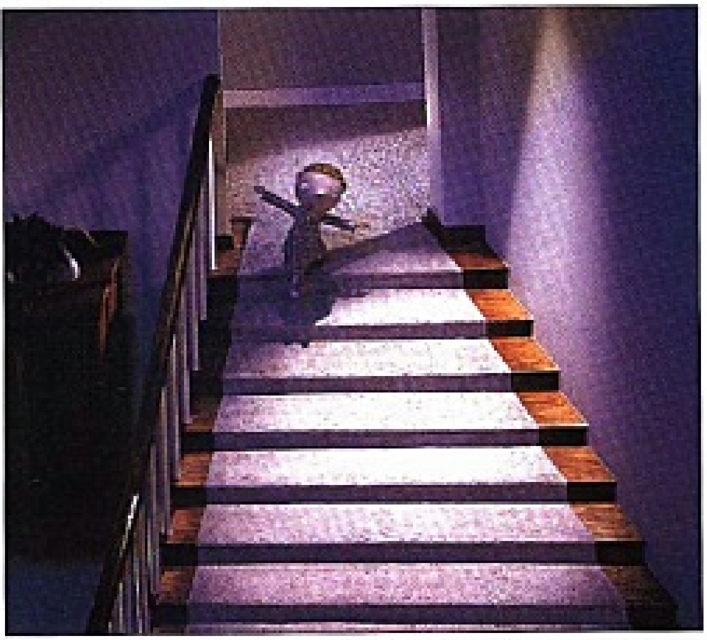


Most of the lead characters have a variety of replaceable parts. In the storeroom, for example, there are bins stuffed with heads and mouths for Barrel and Shock (top left). Jack's heads (left) are kept in boxes in numbered order to coordinate with the lip-synch script (see page 159). Sally's eyelids and lashes (above) constantly have to be recast and individually painted. On stage the puppets often get dirty and are sent back to fabrication to be cleaned (top right).

Angie Glocka and Jim Aupperle (right) work on the shot of Timmy careening down the stairs (below) to greet Santa (see page 64). In animating Timmy, Glocka tried to make him move like a kid pretending to be an airplane. For Aupperle, the challenge was to position the camera correctly at the one angle that worked with the isometric perspective used for the set.





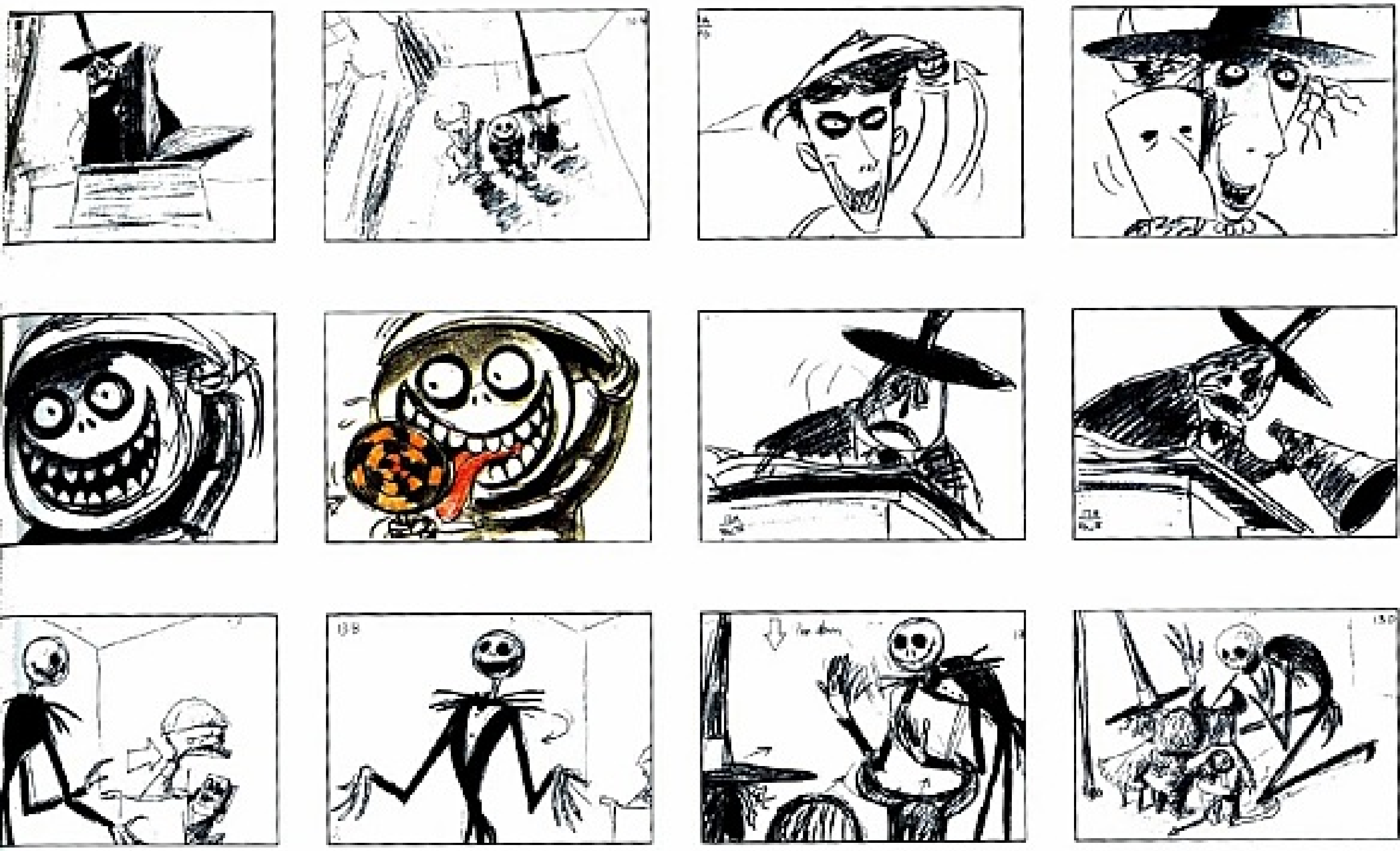
ANIMATION AND CAMERAWORK

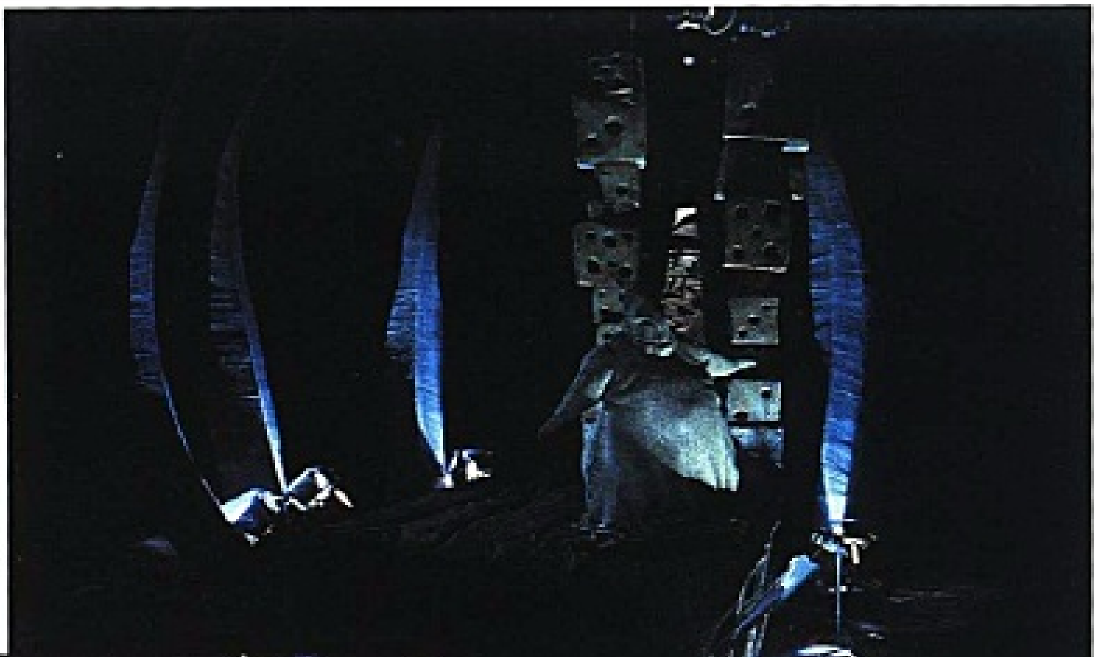
All the work of creating storyboards and sketches and designing sets and characters leads to the cramped, underlit cubicles that serve as animation stages. While all the departments continue to have input, the animation itself is an almost solitary act: one animator, one camera, one scene.

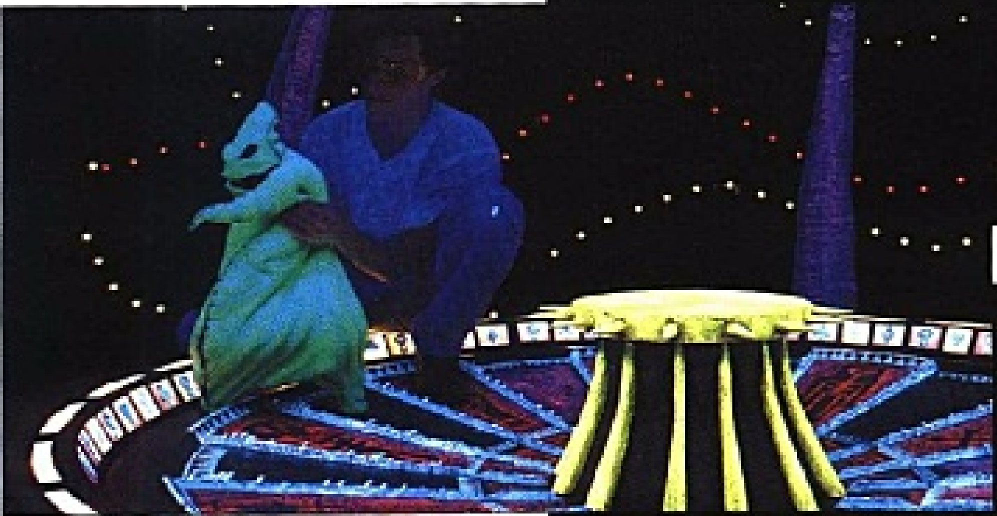
You can watch a stop-motion animator at work for an hour or a day and never notice the slightest progress. Every new position the puppet is placed in is so like the one before that the sequence barely registers to the human eye. Stop-motion animators are miracle workers: technicians, artists, actors, engineers, all rolled into one. They have to bring originality and ingenuity to their work but at the same time make sure that their animation of a character melds perfectly with everyone else's.

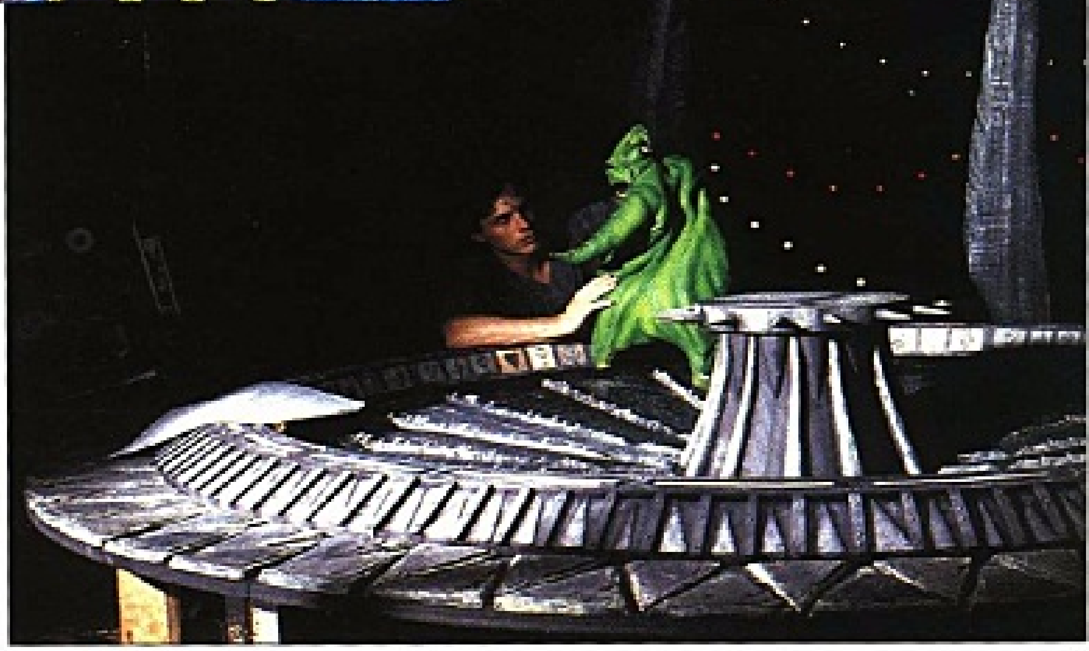
Many different animators worked with Jack Skellington. For example, Loyd Price did an early scene where Jack tosses a coin to some musicians, while Tim Hittle animated most of Jack's next appearance, when he sings his lament. Yet in the final film, Jack appears as a single personality. "Every character has its own unique repertoire that each animator

The storyboard (below) guides Owen Klatte (opposite, bottom) as he animates the sequence in which Jack instructs Lock, Shock, and Barrel to kidnap Sandy Claws. But, as Klatte explains, while working on a shot, the animator fleshes out the storyboard, often "adding gags to make it fun."

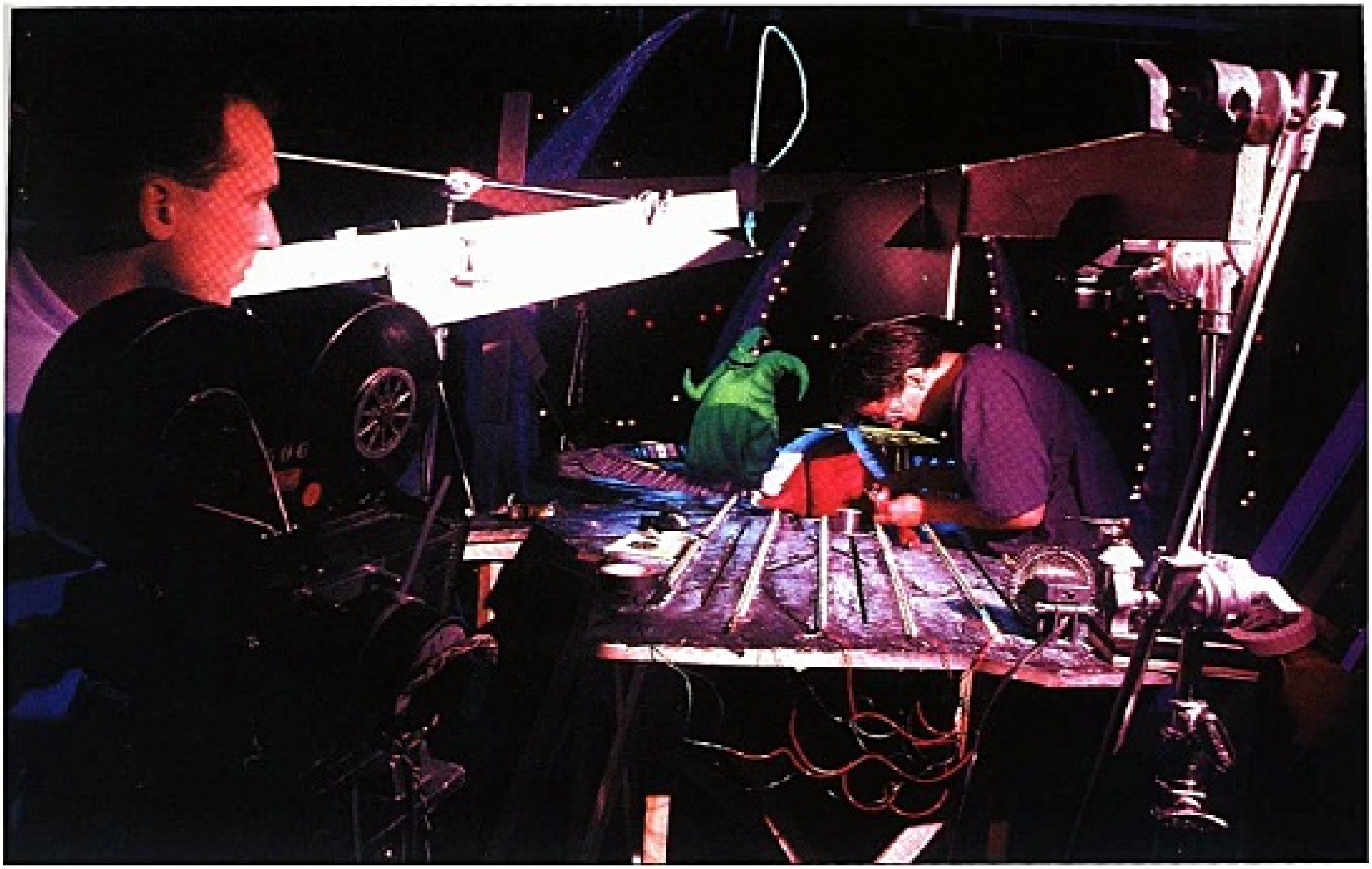


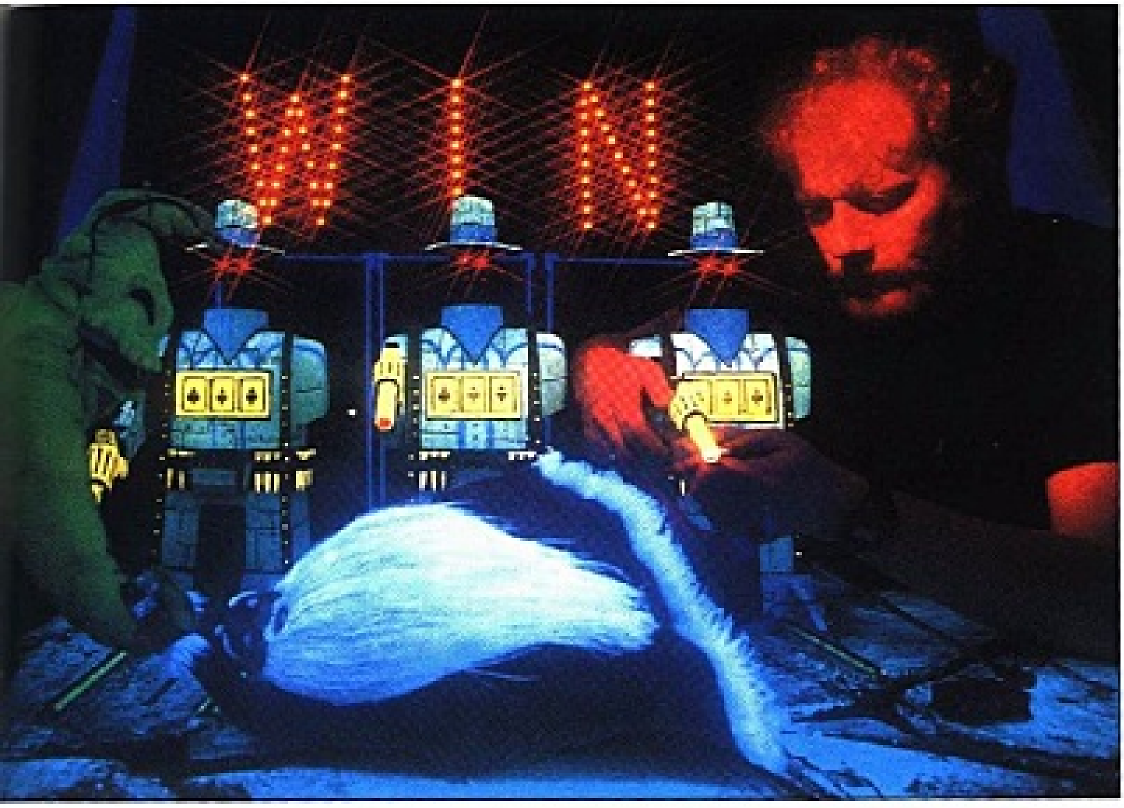






Oogie's lair is seen from different angles in both normal and black (ultraviolet) light. Before animating Oogie for the camera, Eric Leighton (above and right) rehearses the puppet's dance. He even tries out the steps himself to get a feel for how the body should move. On another set (opposite bottom), Owen Klatte animates Oogie's taunting of Santa under ultraviolet light. And on yet another stage (opposite, top), Rich Lehmann checks the camera angle, while Aaron Kohr wires some lights for a shot of Jack and Oogie's fight.

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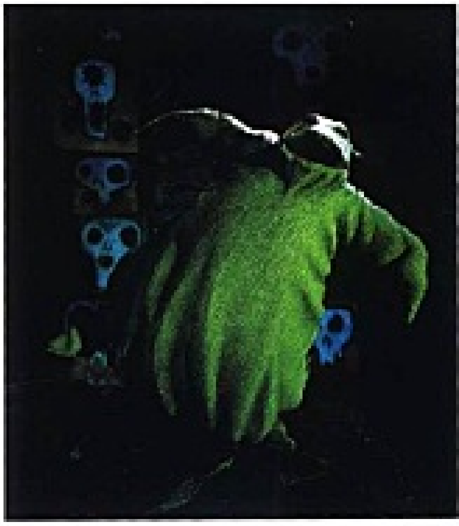


has to be able to duplicate," stresses supervising animator Eric Leighton. "Not only must they all perform it, but they must make it believable that it's the same guy throughout, regardless of their personal styles."

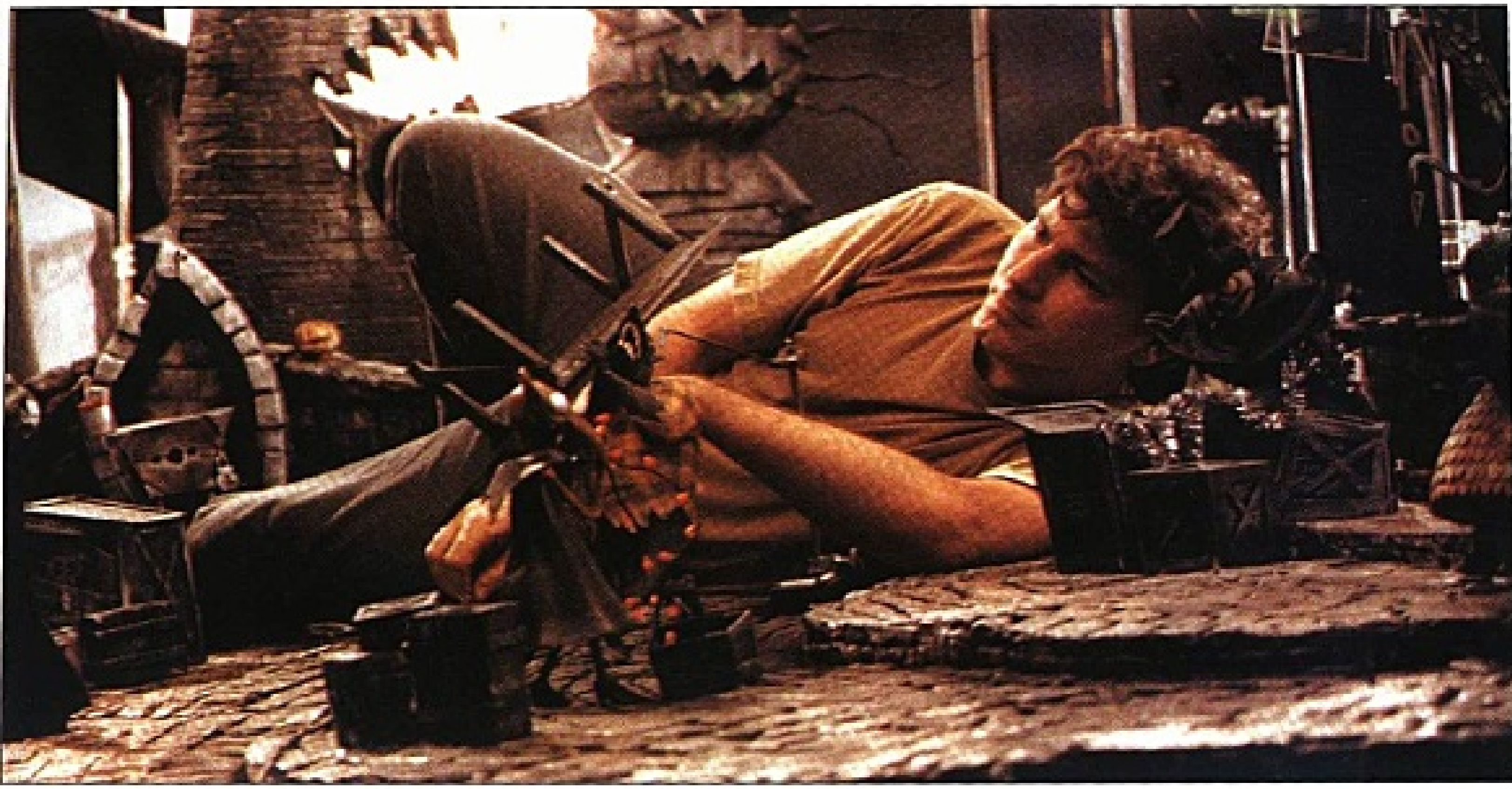
Each animator is an actor who creates a performance through a puppet. But it is one thing to find the perfect gesture to define a character, and quite another to break that gesture down into microseconds and spend a week bringing it to life. Each second of action must be broken down into twenty-four distinct motions—a task that sounds immeasurably easier than it really is.

"It's something that has to be acquired," indicates animator Angie Glocka. "Something happens where you start looking at time in a different way. You automatically start breaking action down in a slower time frame. It's like acting but in slow motion. You get into a rhythm and are kind of performing it but very slowly. Concentration is really important."

To get an idea of just how important concentration is, consider this: at the end of production there were nineteen stages and fourteen animators working simultaneously. Yet their combined efforts produced about only seventy seconds of finished film per week.

Leighton notes, "On a standard Disney animated feature, the average shot length is about four seconds. On this show, the average shot is

Henry Selick (below) shows Paul Berry one idea for the dance Jack does as a scarecrow at the beginning of the film, and Berry tries this out with the puppet on the set (right). Berry also studied the scarecrow's movement in The Wizard of Oz, *and he asked Beth Schneider, a production assistant with dance training, to perform some steps.*



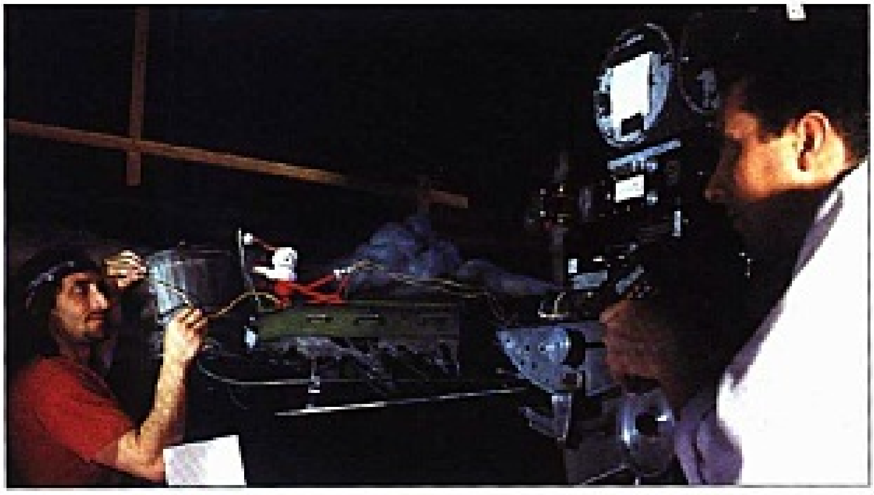
In animating some of the characters for a shot of "Making Christmas," Kim Blanchette has to lie down on stage at times simply to reach them. He doesn't do this just once; he has to climb back up and move them again for each frame on a twelve-day-long shot.

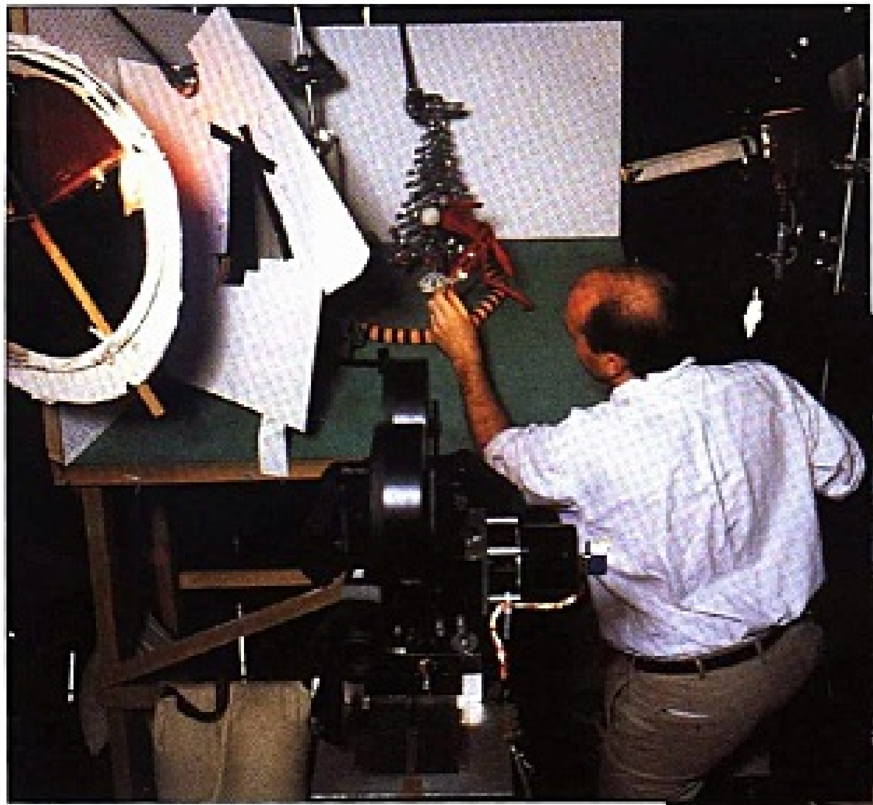
five and a half to six seconds. We have even done ten-, fifteen-, twenty-second shots on *Nightmare Before Christmas,* which is a pretty risky thing to do in stop-motion. We've put as many as ten or eleven days into shooting a single shot."

Animator Owen Klatte points out, "It's very common these days in animation—especially because of MTV—to make things very quick and fast. But Henry Selick wanted to get more of a feeling of a live-action musical into this film, to get long, elegant shots into it."

Nightmare demands longer shots because the camera is always on the move. The film is filled with crane shots, tracking shots, camerawork of the most dazzling kind. In a live-action film, the camera is placed on a crane or a "truck" and moved with the action. But when the actors move about in twenty-fourth-of-a-second increments, filming them with fluid camera movement is problematic. That's where computers come in.

The motion control ("mocon") camera is a distant cousin of the industrial robot that revolutionized the auto industry. The length of the shot and direction and speed of the camera movement are programmed into a computer, so every time a frame of film is exposed, the camera moves an infinitesimal degree. "Programming the mocon is an interesting synthesis between left brain and right brain," claims director of photography





On screen Jack appears as one character, but in reality several Jacks are filmed on different stages. For example, Justin Kohn (top left) animates Jack driving his sleigh, as Matt White checks the camera framing, while on another stage (top right) Joel Fletcher animates a duplicate Santa Jack. Steve Buckley (above) works on a Christmas Eve scene. And another stage (right) is set up for Jack's takeoff in his sleigh from Halloween Town.

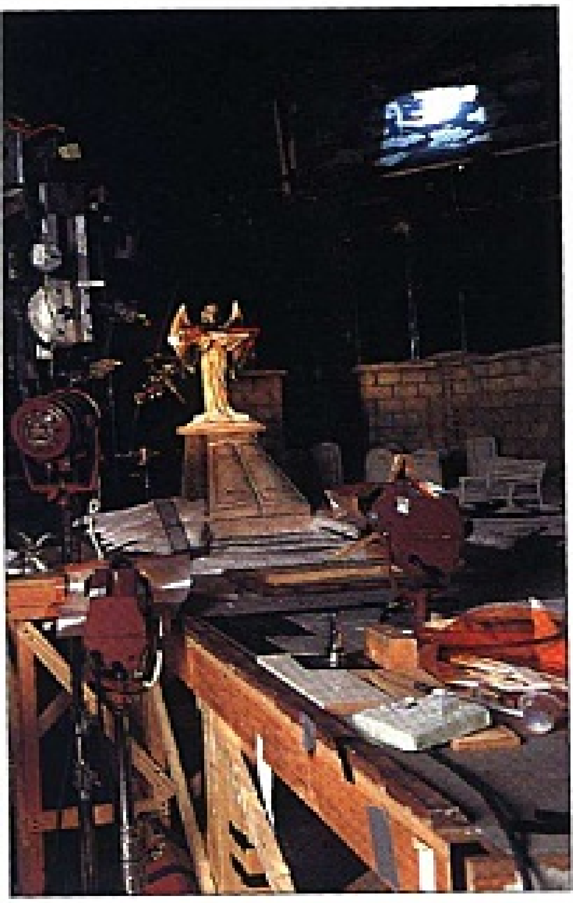
Pete Kozachik. "You have to know what the bits and bytes are doing, but you also have to have a feel for the quality of the shot. The mocon is used to enhance the image rather than impress with technical acumen."

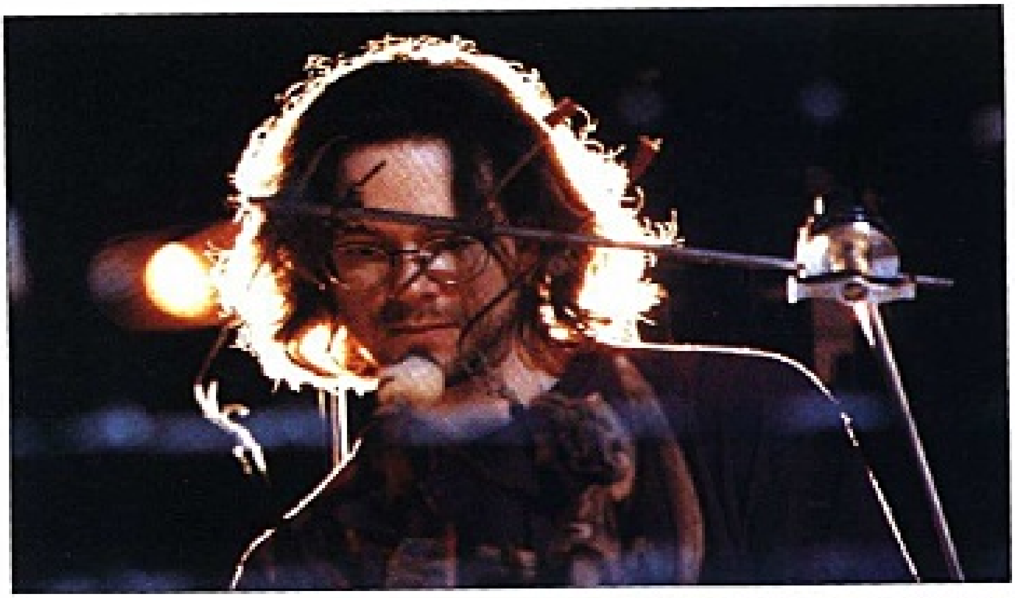
Some camera movement, however, is still done the old-fashioned way. When the length of the shot has been determined, the number of frames to be exposed is figured out and a long piece of tape is placed along the route of the camera movement. A mark is made on the tape, and as each frame is exposed, the camera is moved forward one notch. "It's a bit more limiting," says Kozachik. "You can't be quite as sculptural or as specific about the feel of the camera movement."

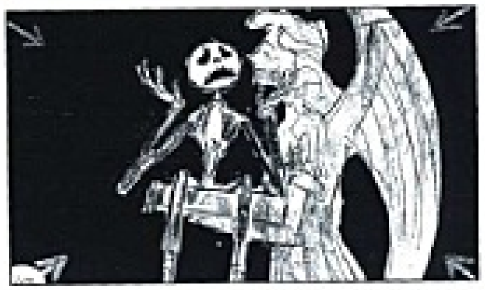
The tape method is used mainly for camera pans or tilts. "When we get into a major flying camera move," Kozachik notes, "it's really a lot more expeditious to let the robot do it. It's just not as likely to screw up."

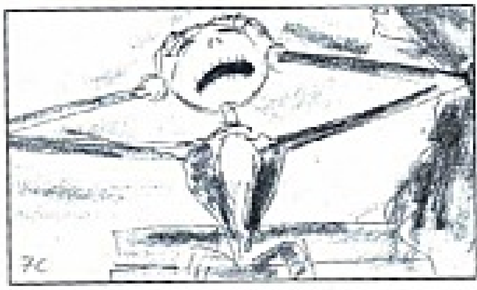
One reason each shot takes so long to complete on this film is that the animators make extensive tests before shooting the "hero" shot (the actual take). "We may shoot four or five tests on a shot," Eric Leighton indicates. "We wait until the camera crew's done with the lighting for the day, and if we have an hour we'll shoot a fast test on tens or twenties."

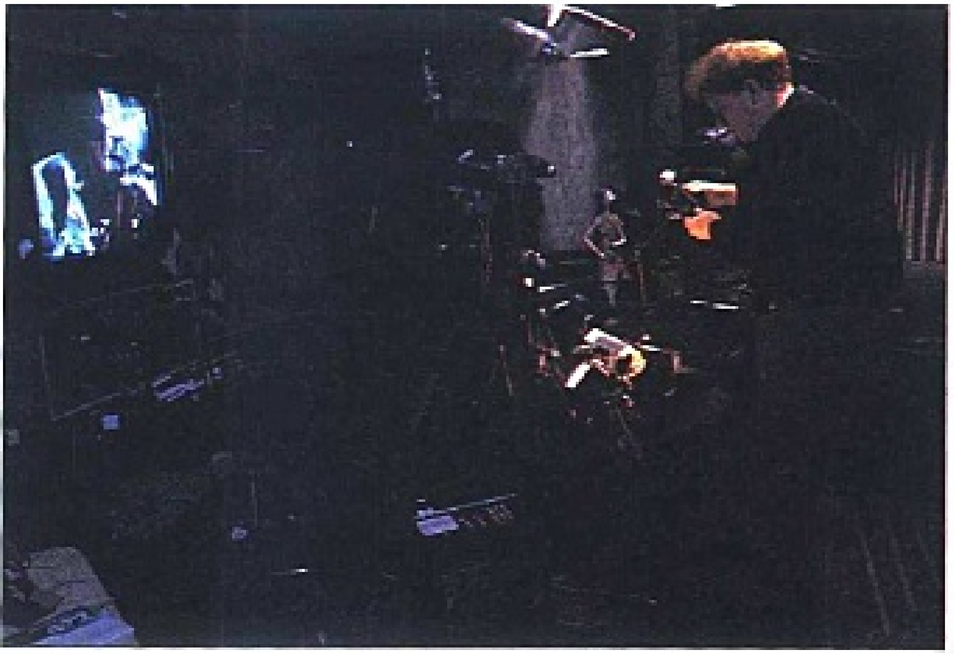
Anthony Scott (below) adjusts Jack's position after he has fallen into the arms of an angel in the Real World cemetery (see the set at left and storyboard for the song "Poor Jack" on bottom). This complicated sequence took months to complete (as Scott describes on page 153).

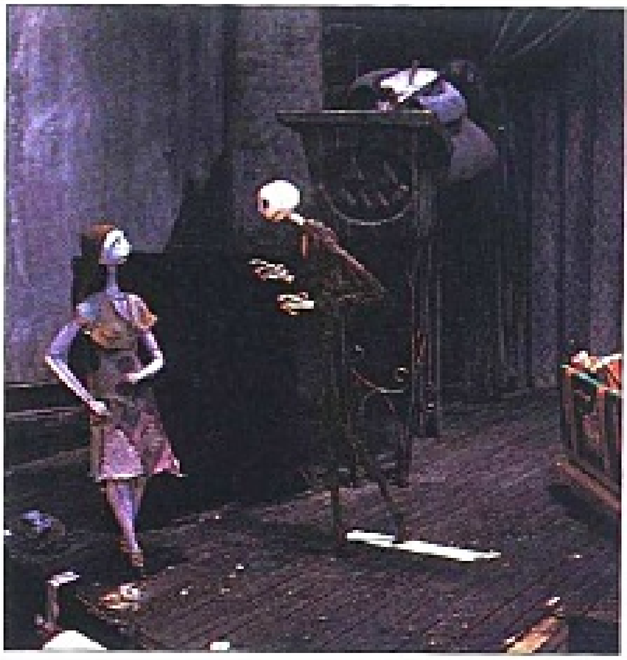












In animating the scene where Jack asks Sally to sew his Santa outfit (above left and right), Owen Klatte tries to convey, through the puppets' gestures, the miscommunication between the two. To make the animation look smooth from frame to frame, without any "pops" or sudden jumps, Klatte refers to a video screen (at far left above), which shows the previous frame.

Shooting on "tens or twenties" means that each major pose of the puppet is held for ten or twenty frames—what the animators call a "pop through." The idea is to test out the blocking of the scene, check out the lighting, and anticipate problems for the hero shot, which is "shot on ones," with one movement for each frame of film exposed.

"Since we're not doing a cel-animated film," stresses Leighton, "we can't go back and correct a drawing. We start on frame one and end up at the end of the shot. We can only go through it forward. You just don't know what you're going to run into until you've worked your way through the shot a few times."

Most of the animators agree that the extensive testing is one of the best things about working on the film. It is one of the elements that makes *Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas* a masterpiece of stop-motion animation.

"I've never been allowed to do tests like I do here," says animator Anthony Scott. "Usually they give you your bit and say, 'Just go for it. Do your best.' And there's no time to go back and reshoot or test things you're not sure about. This project gives us the freedom to do that."

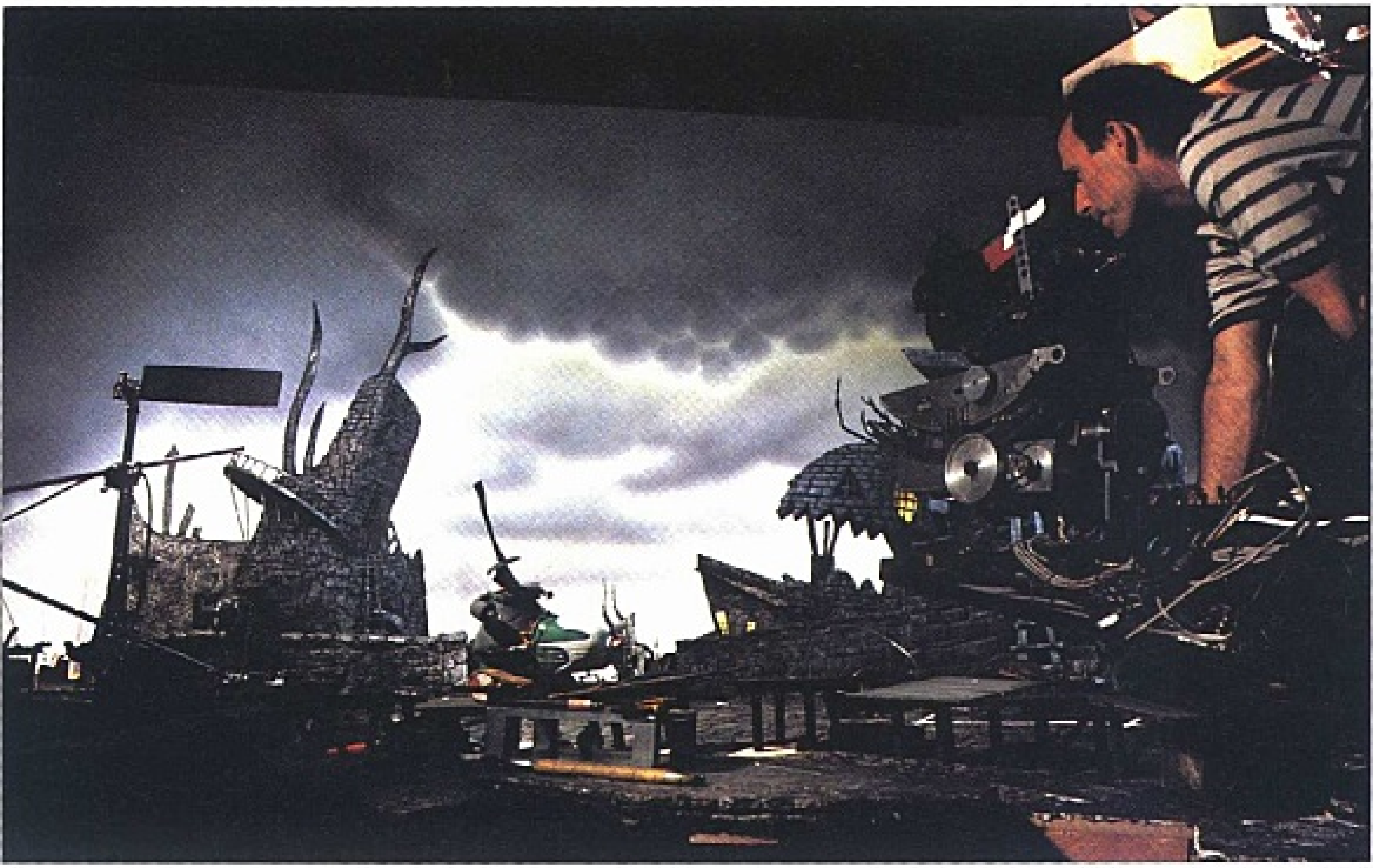
Once the hero shot is underway, most animators use a frame storage device with a video screen to help keep track of things. "With this system," explains Owen Klatte, "I can flip between the previous two frames I shot and the current frame I'm working on. I can check how far a character moves in a couple of frames and make sure everything's moving in the right direction. Sometimes I draw lines directly on the video screen, an outline of the character, so I can see over a course of, say, twenty frames, how the increments have changed."

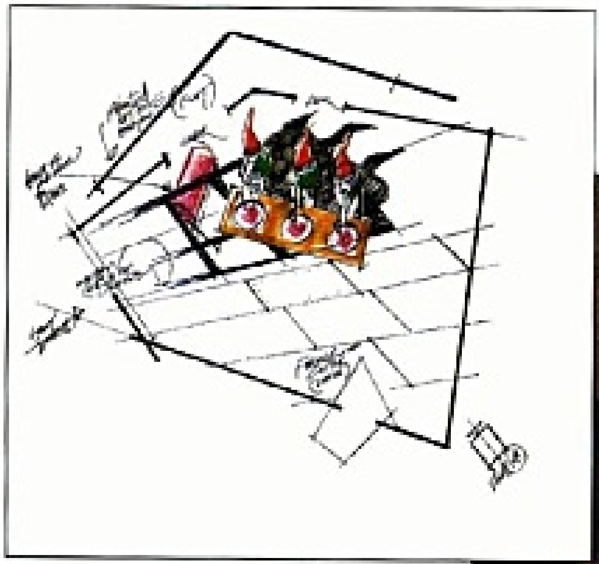
A particularly tricky problem on this project is making sure that one scene flows easily into the next. Animator Mike Belzer points out, "If you see Jack walking out of a door and in the next scene he's walking through the woods, those might be shot six months apart because those are two totally different sets."

Other sequences are problematic because they are animated by two animators at once. Belzer recalls, "There's a two-and-a-half minute scene when Jack sings 'Jack's Obsession.' It might take one animator six months to do that. So we had two identical sets built and used two Jack puppets. Angie Glocka animated the first half of the song, and I animated the second half. But it appears to be one continuous sequence in the film."

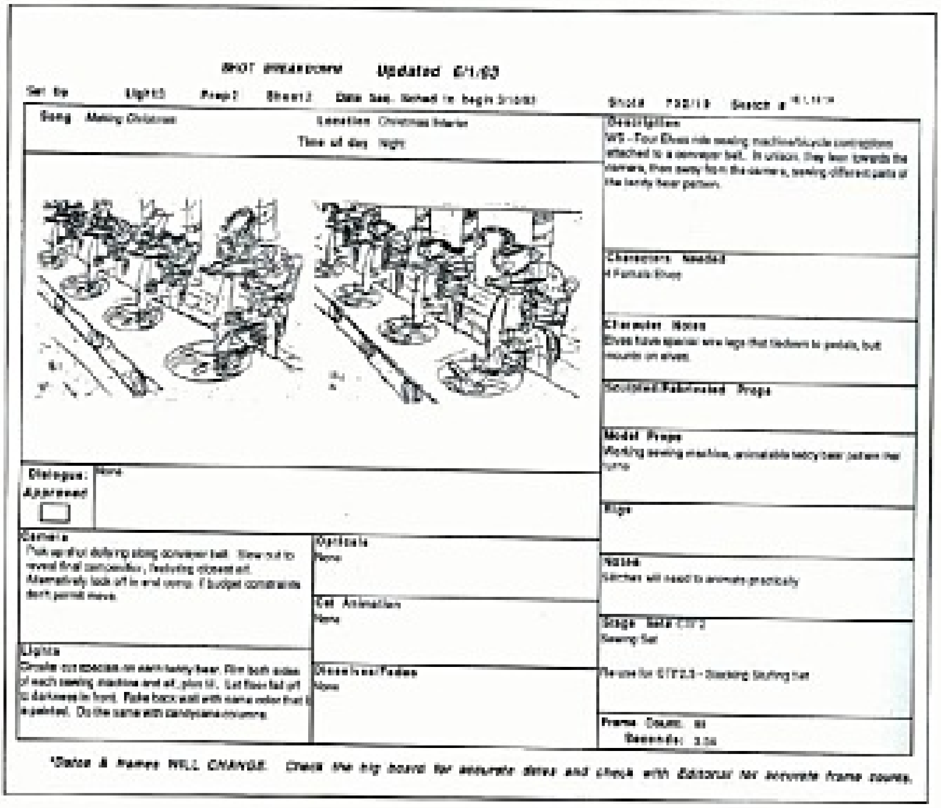
The sequence in which Jack awakens in a cemetery after being shot down and sings "Poor Jack" was animated entirely by Anthony Scott (ex-

Pat Sweeney peers through the camera to check the scene where Jack returns to Halloween Town in a snowmobile after discovering Christmas. He not only makes sure the framing is right, but also looks for any necessary changes in lighting or adjustments to the set, such as touching up the paint on a particular building.





Even a brief shot in the film, such as the elves sewing teddy-bear patterns during "Making Christmas" (right), requires a lot of work from every department. A sketch (above) shows the basic staging of the shot, while the shot breakdown sheet (below right) includes the storyboard script and details all the elements needed, from props to lighting. In this case, a change was made, and only three elves, rather than four, were used in the actual shot.



SHOT BREAKDOWN Updated 6/1/93

Set Up Lights Props Sheet 2 Date Seq. [illegible] Shot# [illegible] Sketch #

Song Making Christmas

Location Christmas Interior

Time of day Night

Description
WS - Four Elves ride sewing machine/bicycle contraptions attached to a conveyor belt. In unison, they lean towards the camera, then away from the camera, sewing different parts of the teddy bear pattern.

Characters Needed
4 [illegible] Elves

Character Notes
Elves have special wire legs that fasten to pedals, but [illegible] on elves.

Sculpted/Fabricated Props

Model Props
Working sewing machine, animatable teddy bear pattern [illegible]

Rigs

Dialogue: None

Approved ☐

Camera
[illegible]

Opticals
None

Cel Animation
None

Notes
[illegible]

Stage Date [illegible]
Sewing Set

Lights
[illegible]

Dissolves/Fades
None

Frame Count: [illegible]
Seconds: [illegible]

*Dates & frames WILL CHANGE. Check the big board for accurate dates and check with Editorial for accurate frame counts.

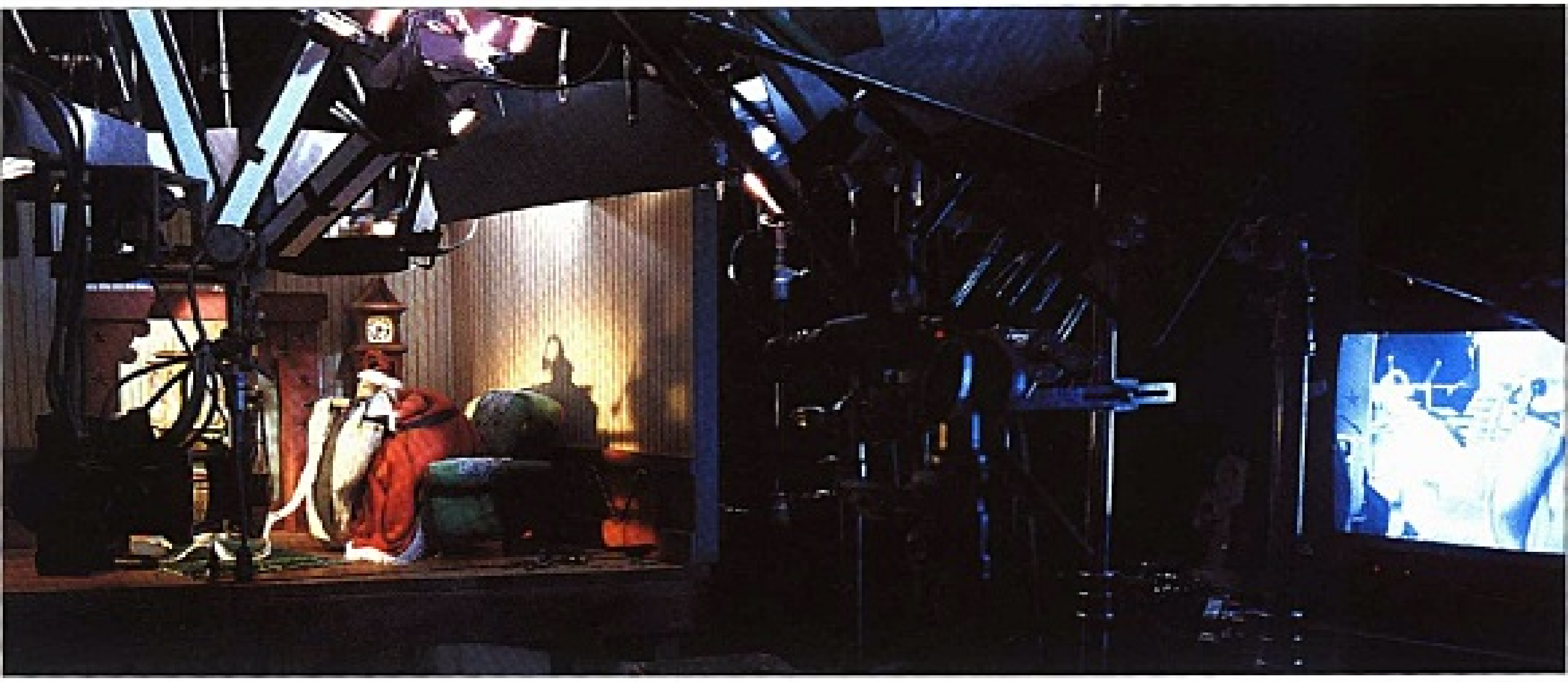
cept for some Zero shots, which Richard Zimmerman animated). Although it's only about three minutes long, it took months to complete. "I began work on it in October 1992 and continued through the end of March 1993," Scott says.

In this scene, the only characters are Jack and his ghost dog Zero. To make Zero look transparent, he is sometimes double-exposed onto the film, sometimes an optical element, and sometimes projected into the shot with a "beam splitter," a two-way mirror that is set in front of the camera lens at a forty-five-degree angle. With the beam splitter, Zero is animated away from the main set and shot against a black background, so that he appears transparent when his image is mixed into the scene.

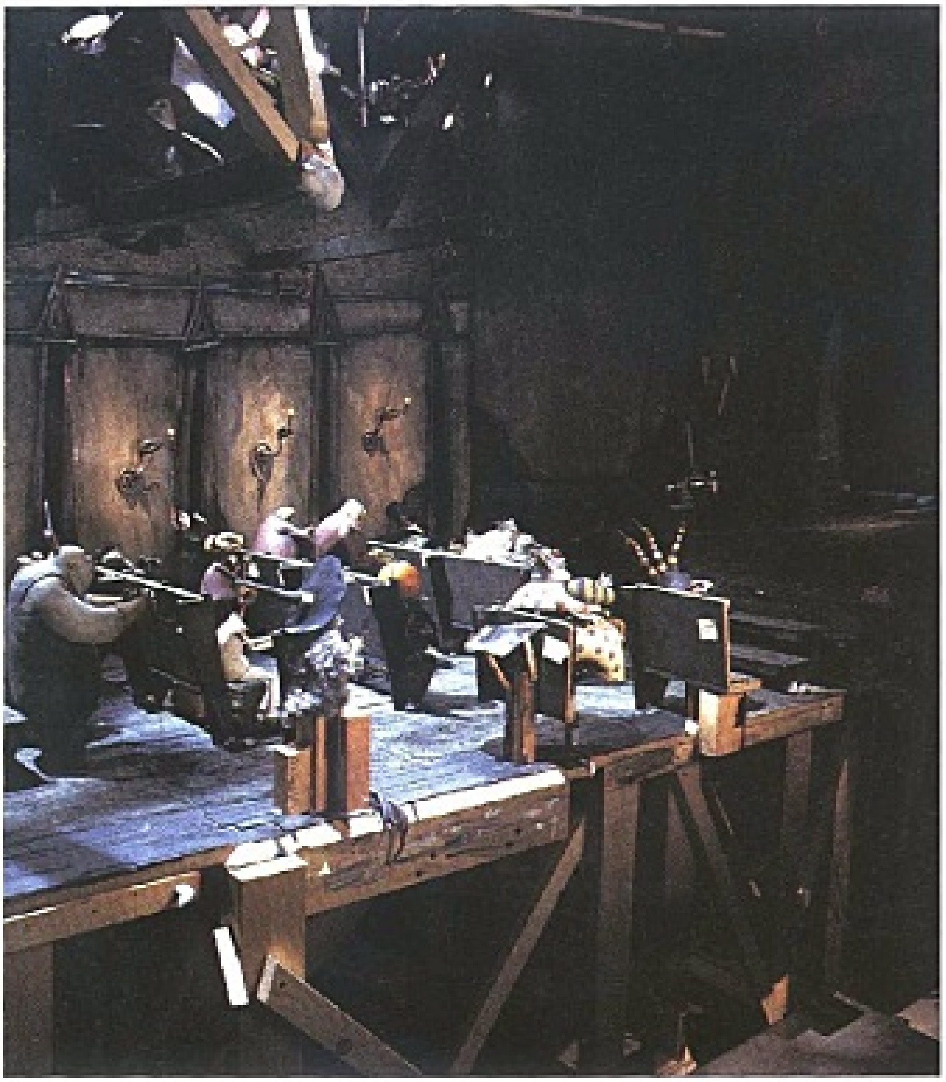
Confusing? It gets worse. While animating a scene with Zero and Jack, Scott found out just how dumbfounding the experience could be. "Because we were using the beam splitter," Scott recalls, "I had to animate Zero on the blacked-out set and Jack on the cemetery set. Zero was actually several feet away, but through the camera he appeared in the cemetery. We had a video monitor right next to the camera so I could match the characters' eye lines. It's real important to me that the characters relate well."

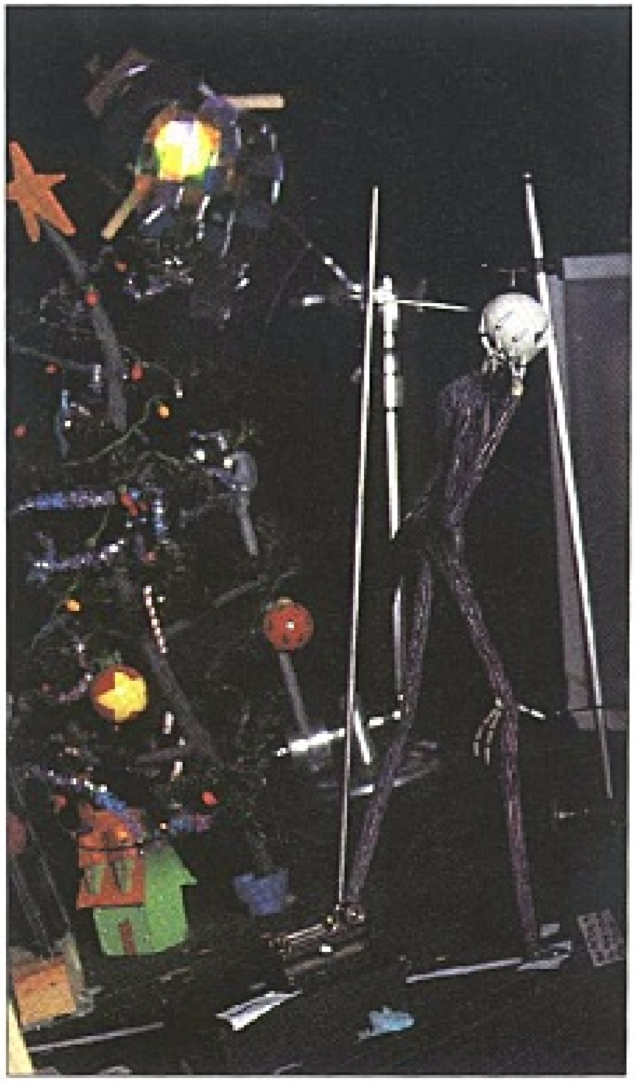
"At one point," Scott continues, "Jack grabs a hat out of the dog's mouth. Now the dog is transparent and the hat is real, and there's a frame where the hat has to switch over from Zero's mouth into Jack's hand. That was the toughest shot I've done. It took five days. Five long days."

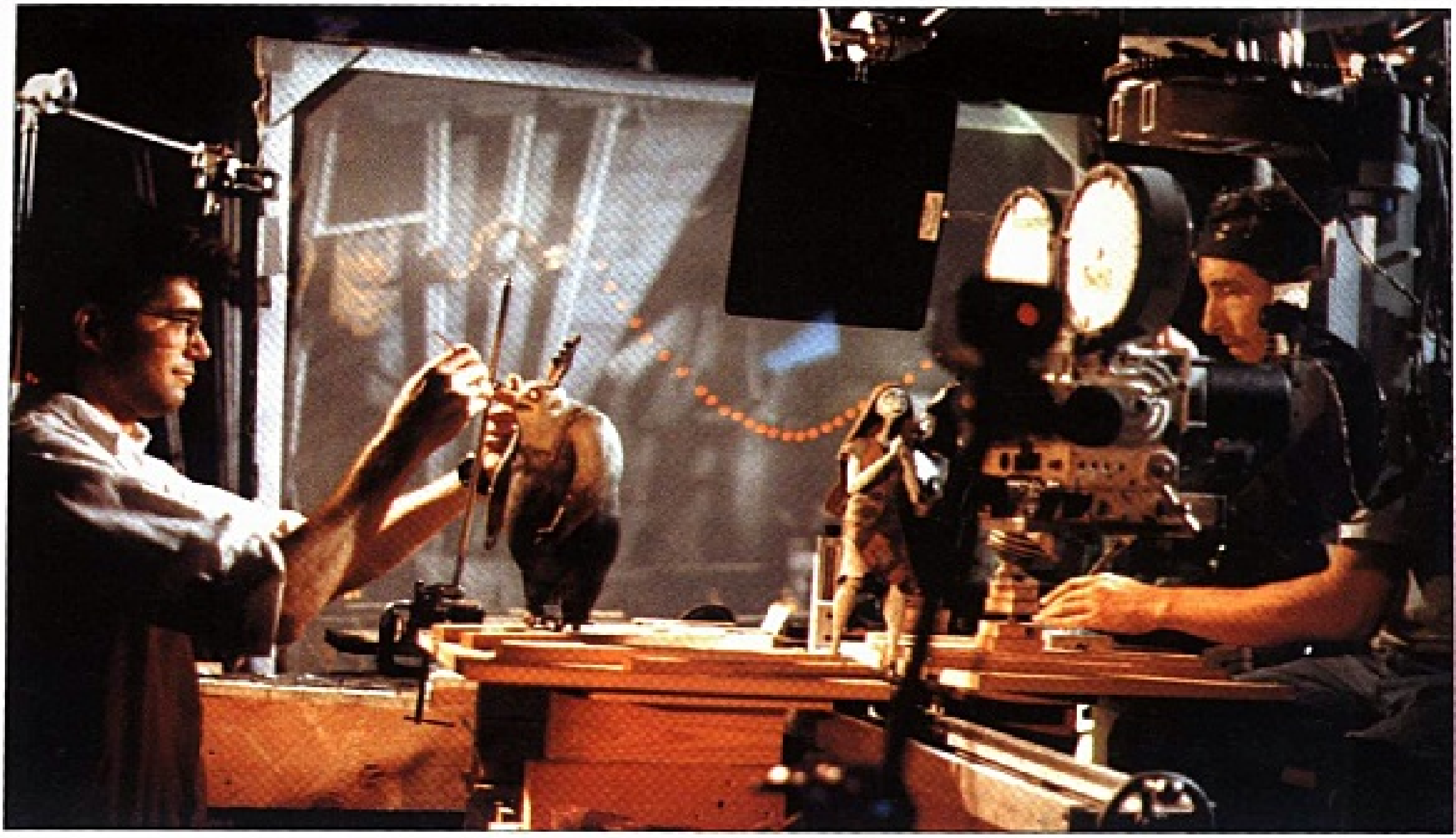
Anything can change once the first tests of a shot are reviewed. After the filming of Santa reading his list got underway (below), it was decided that Mrs. Claus (who is only glimpsed in the background) looked too elf-like. Fabrication was called in to snip away and change the shape of the puppet.



Paul Berry recalls the fun of animating Jack during "The Town Meeting Song" (right)—of creating a performance for "a character who is also putting on a show." But "when Jack turns away from the audience and lets the pretense drop, you see the real Jack," Berry notes (see the stage below right). At first the crowd shots were animated by Angie Glocka and Steve Buckley on another stage, but at the end the two sets were brought together (below).







Mike Johnson (left) helps set up the shot that leads into "Sally's Song," as Justin Kohn (right) reaches in to animate Sally. When she walks through the crowd in this scene, Sally is on a model mover (a mechanical device that moves the puppet). For her actual song, Sally is animated on a different set by Trey Thomas, who tries to make her movements fit the charm and innocence of Catherine O'Hara's singing voice.

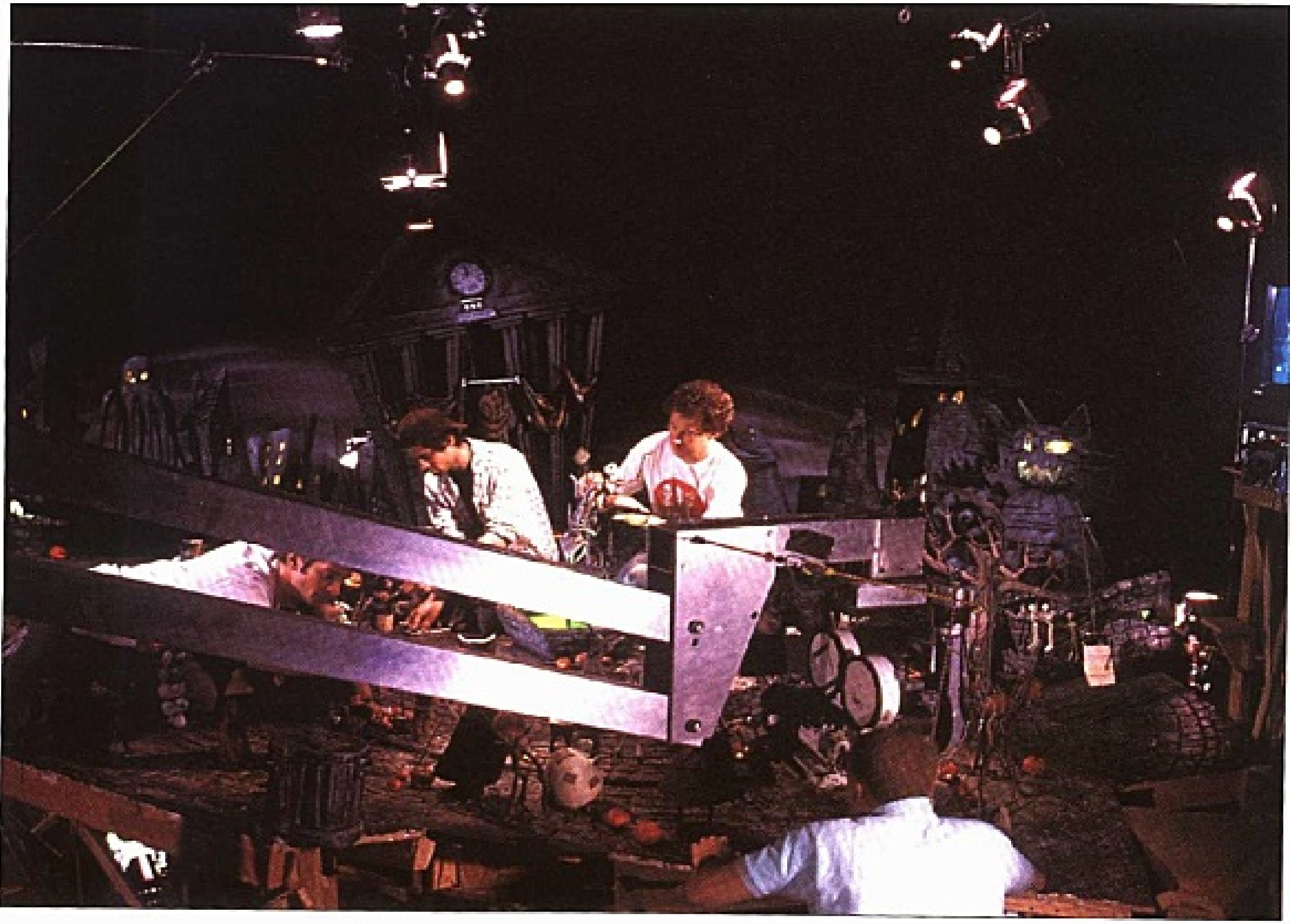
Nightmare's weird characters offered many challenges to the animators. Trey Thomas describes the huge Oogie Boogie, for example, as "like no other puppet I have ever worked with." Yet one character everybody thought would be trouble was anything but: Jack Skellington. A typical stop-motion puppet is short and squat with extra-large feet for easy balance. Jack is impossibly tall and thin, with tiny feet, thin ankles, and outrageously long arms. A puppet, in short, to give any animator pause.

Owen Klatte reflects, "Jack is definitely not as bad as I thought he was going to be. He's very tall and you have certain problems with him, but overall he has a lot of movement, a lot of freedom."

"You almost get spoiled when you play with a puppet as nice as Jack Skellington," claims Mike Belzer. "He is this beautiful, thin armature that has virtually no foam binding."

"He's the easiest puppet in the world," agrees Angie Glocka. "He's like a walking armature. He's the best, most fun character, which is really lucky for us because he's the star of the show."

To make sure Jack and everything else look just right, the animators and camera crew constantly review their shots with Selick and Stan Webb,



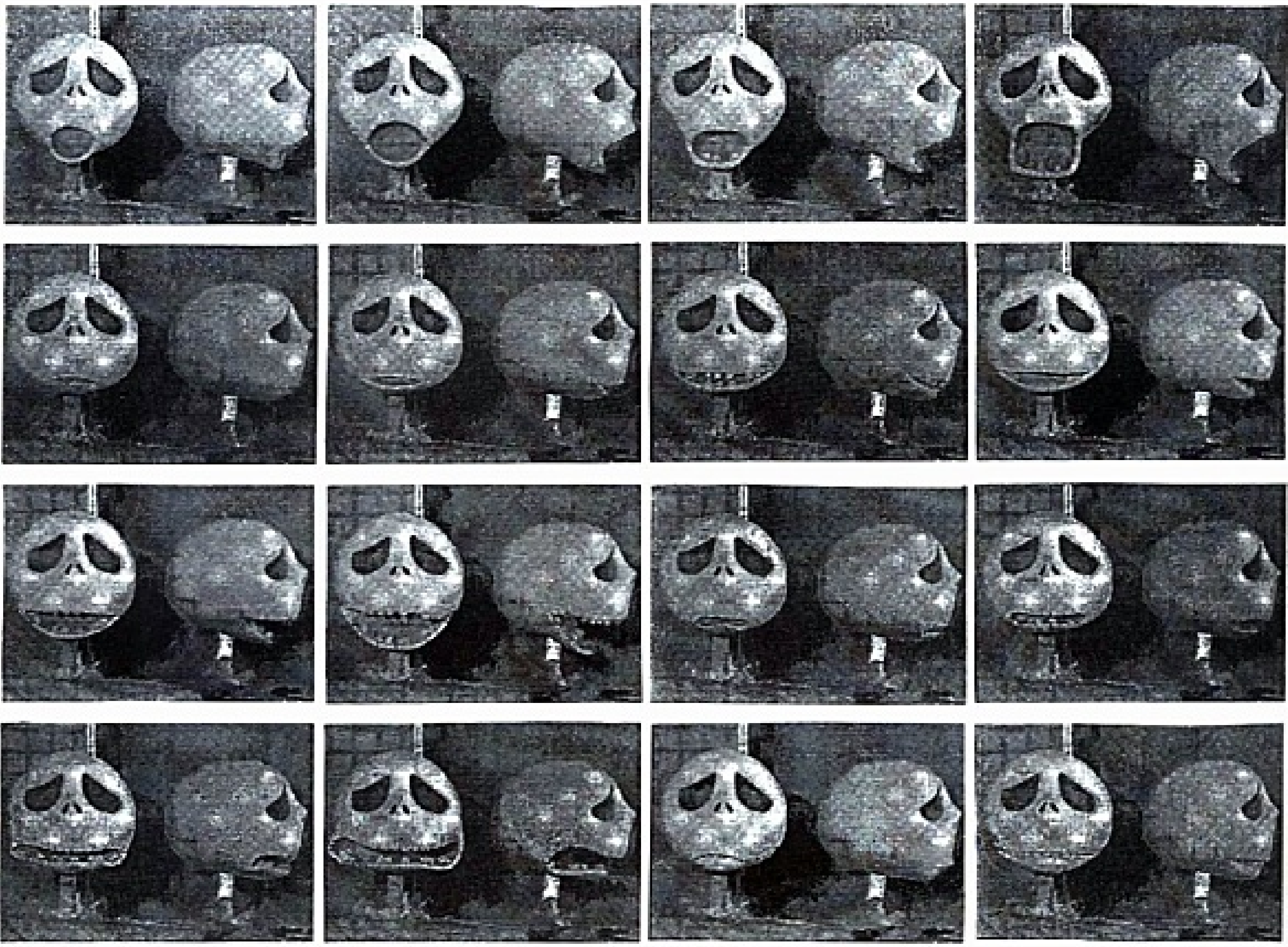
Camera assistant Carl Miller looks through the lens as Ken Willard, Mike Johnson, and Richard Zimmerman (left to right) prepare the puppets for a shot of Town Square involving over fifty characters. In the foreground is the arm of the motion control camera, or mocon, which uses a computer to control the camera movement.

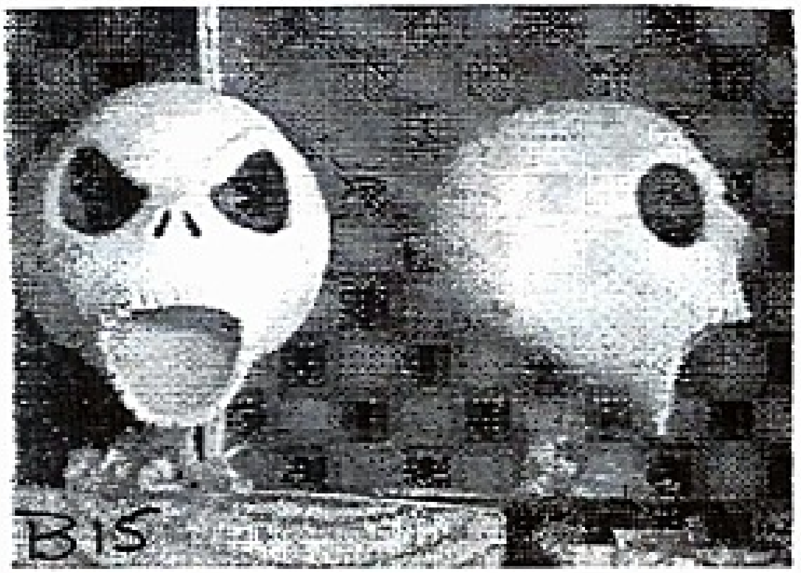
the film's editor. Each morning Webb cuts the previous day's footage into the "rough cut" of the film, replacing earlier shots or storyboards, so the new take can be seen in context, with what comes before and after.

Although every scene is carefully storyboarded beforehand, there are still changes once shooting begins. "The timing may not be right," notes Webb, "or something may not be clear." One example he gives is the scene where Sally picks up a bottle of fog juice: "We thought in the storyboard that was just one shot. But once we filmed it, it was hard to read. We used a long shot and cut to a closeup of the bottle, so you can read the words 'fog juice.' But mostly it's the other way; usually we over-storyboard and then find we need less animation to make the point."

For everyone involved at the filming stage, the process is one of constant testing and readjustment to make everything come together.

Edie Ichioka looks over Andrea Biklian's shoulder (top) in the editing room, as they examine the film using a synchronizer. One of the most important editing tools is the flatbed (above left), which allows the picture and soundtrack to be viewed together. Production staff members like George Young and Alia Agha (above) are constantly consulting the "big board," which shows the entire production schedule, day by day, stage by stage, shot by shot. On stage, Pete Kozachik, Loyd Price, Jim Aupperle, and Brian Van't Hul (left, left to right) confer on a shot of the musicians in Halloween Town.

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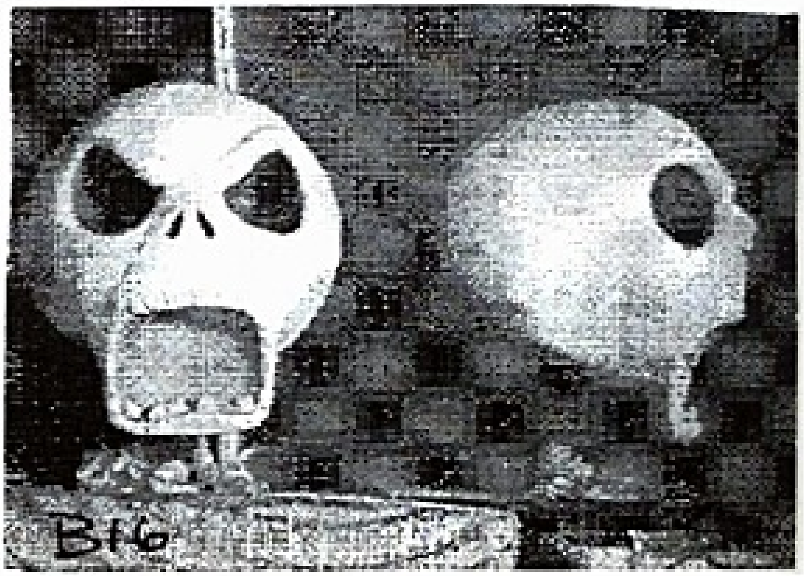
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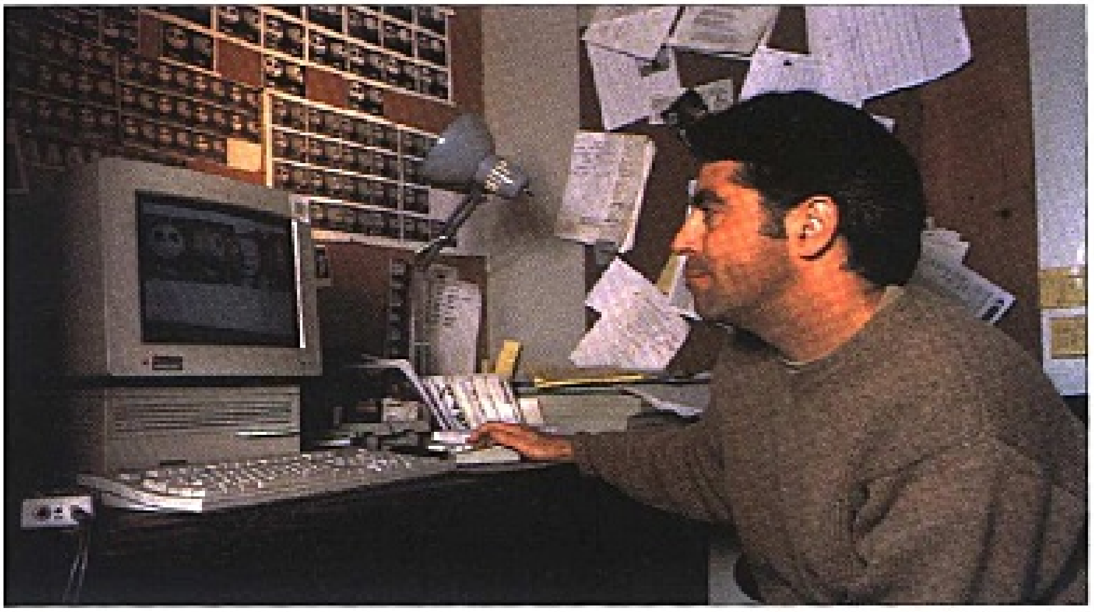


Dan Mason (left) uses a computer to develop a lip-synch "script" for puppets with replacement heads like Jack. "To create a menu of different heads, so I can choose which head is appropriate with which sound," Mason explains, "I took a video camera and shot a frame of each head and scanned the images into the computer" (part of the menu for Jack is shown opposite). After breaking down the character's speech phonetically and selecting appropriate heads, Mason runs the whole sequence through on the computer to see if it works.

ADDING SOUND AND SCORING

Creating the soundtrack for *Nightmare Before Christmas* and blending it with the film was a complicated process. To make the puppets seem to actually speak and sing, all the dialogue had to be recorded before filming began. This was especially important for Jack and Sally, who had numerous replacement heads, each with the mouth articulating a different sound. The animators had to know which head to use for each frame.

Here the computer helped. Dan Mason, the track reader, analyzed every frame of a character's speech on the soundtrack and matched it with a picture of the puppet's head from a menu of possibilties on his computer. He then printed out a "head" script for the animators.

During filming, the script continued to evolve, so sometimes dialogue had to be rerecorded later. Or there might be changes in a character's style. Chris Lebenzon, who helped with sound dubbing, cites Jack's speaking voice, some of which was rerecorded to make Jack livelier.

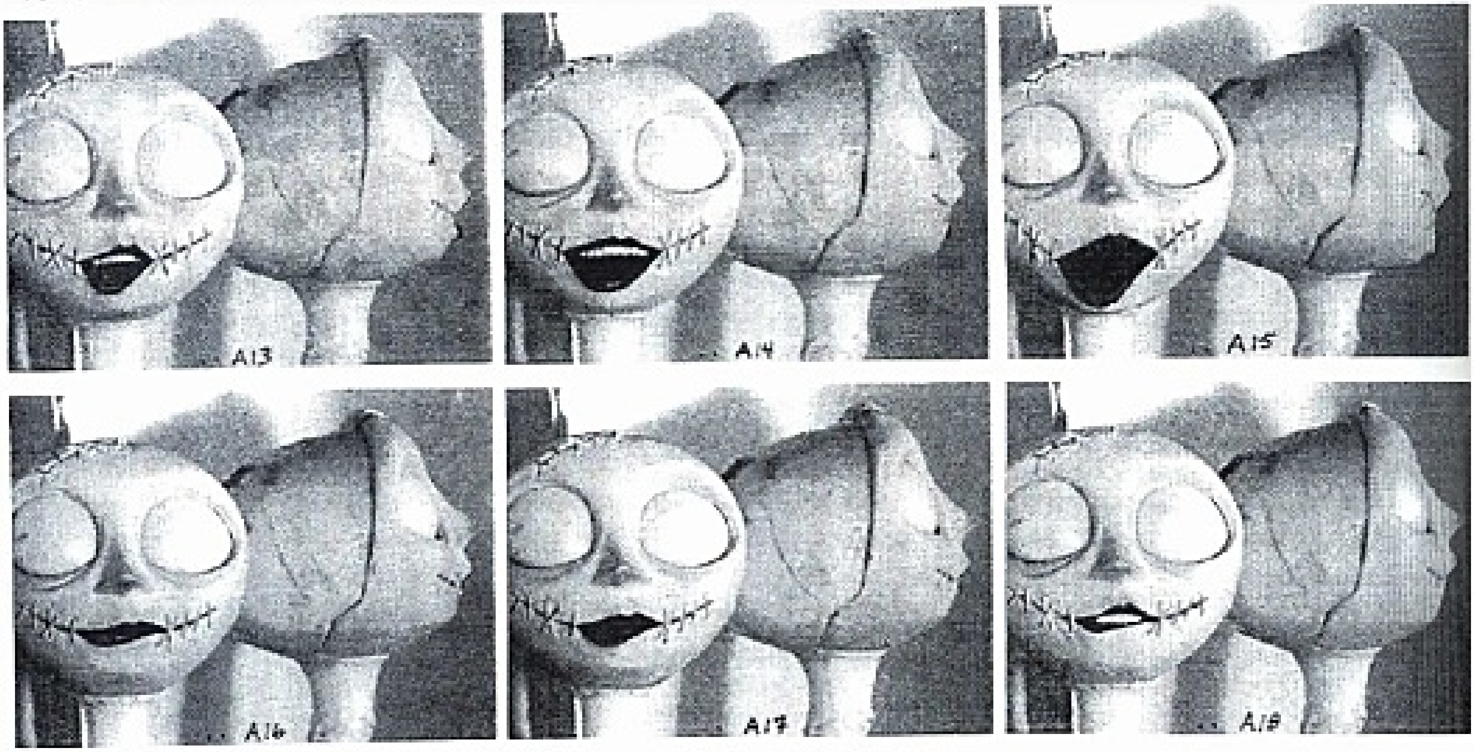
Finishing the music was one of the last stages of film production. Although music editor Bob Badami created a temporary soundtrack for screening purposes, Danny Elfman could not compose the actual musical score, the "incidental" or "background" music, until the very end.

Usually the composer receives a black-and-white pencil version of an animated film, so the score can be composed while the animation is in the works. But in stop-motion animation, Elfman explains, "There's either finished footage or there's no footage. There's no temporary footage, no black-and-white version that is busily being colored in. As a result, I couldn't score the movie until all the animation was done."

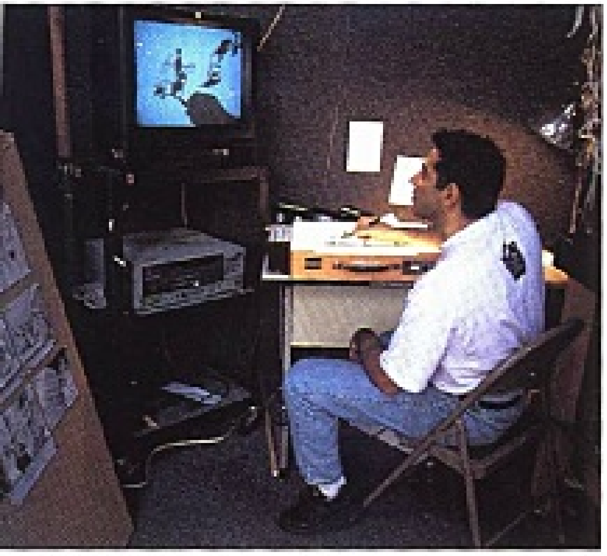
Although it was an "intense pressure" job, Elfman had a head start. He had already composed some thirty minutes of songs for the seventy-minute movie, cutting his job almost in half. Moreover, the main musical themes already existed in song form, so he could adapt those themes to the dramatic needs of the underscore. "There was so much thematic material already there," he recalls, "that creating significant new thematic material would have been a detriment to the film. The main problem was choosing which material I wanted to rely on most heavily for the score."

Many of Elfman's most beautiful and powerful scores were composed for and recorded by huge orchestras with nearly 100 instruments. The dark grandeur of *Batman* (1989), the melancholy loveliness of *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), and the Gershwinesque lushness of *Dick Tracy* (1990)—all Elfman scores—recall the majesty of the great film composers of the past he most admires: Bernard Herrmann, Alfred Newman, and Miklos Rozsa. The score for *Nightmare,* however, is smaller and more eccentric, using a mid-sized orchestra of fifty to sixty pieces. "I wanted a very punchy, old-fashioned sound on this," Elfman says. "I wanted it to sound (even though it's in stereo) as if it were recorded in 1951."

While working with the orchestra, Bob Badami notes, it was important to keep the music in close synch with the picture. So a computer was used to develop a sophisticated metronome the musicians could follow, creating the illusion that the sound and images were made together.



Although there are many choices on the computer menu for Sally's head (a few of which are shown below), Dan Mason tried to keep the total number to a minimum, deciding on ten or eleven essential mouth shapes for each of her expressions.



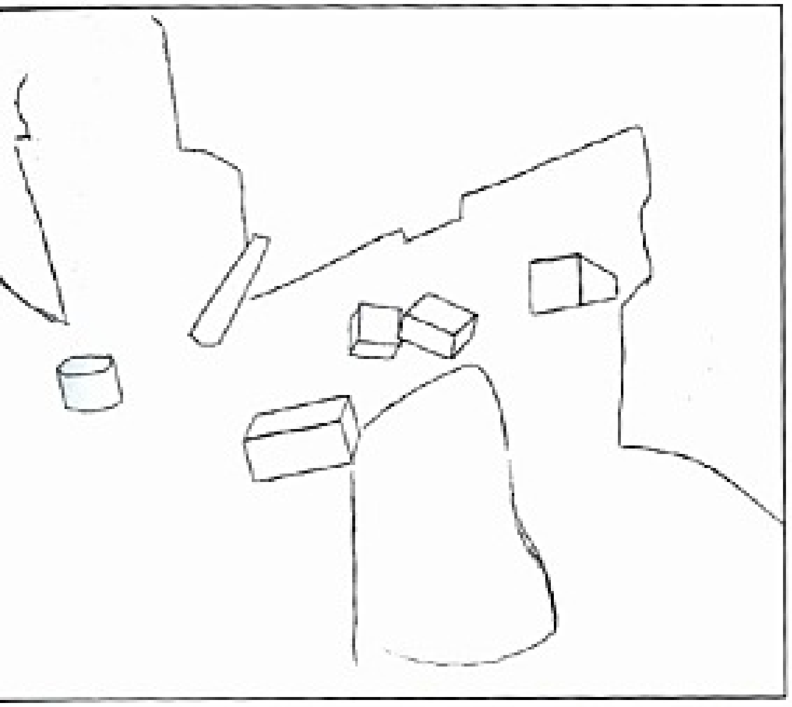
Scientist brings the reindeer skeletons to life, Baker animated the electricity coming out of the electrodes, "zapping the reindeer into life."

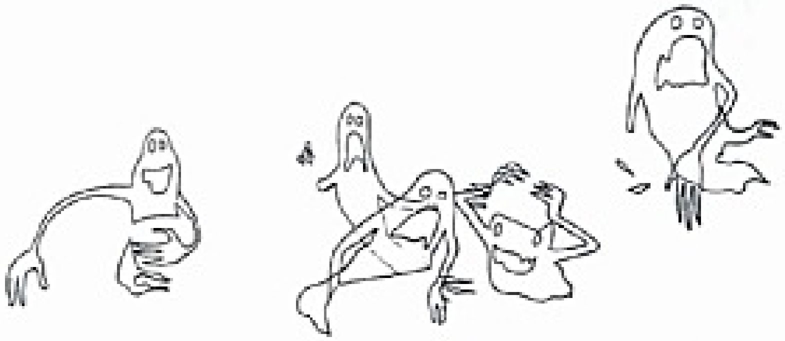
For these kinds of effects, the drawn animation has to interact with the stop-motion, which requires turning the three-dimensional puppets into drawings. "I have to wait until they're finished shooting their puppet animation," Baker explains. "Then I get a work print from them, which has to be projected onto an animation stand and rotoscoped—traced, frame by frame—so I can animate around the character."

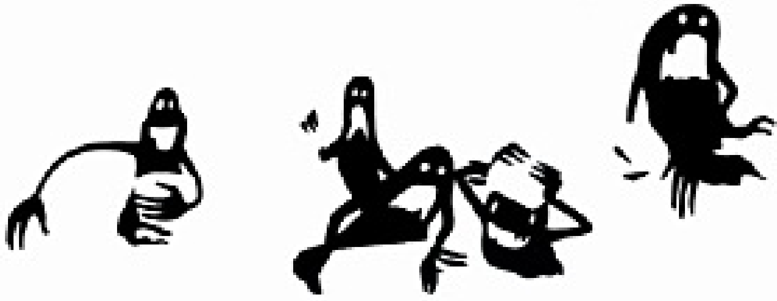
Effects animation is added to the stop-motion footage in a variety of ways. Sometimes an effect is drawn before the stop-motion is begun. The drawing is then projected directly onto the set. "They shoot the puppet doing its action," Baker says, "then they back-wind the film and set up a card and project my animation onto the same set and double-expose it that way."

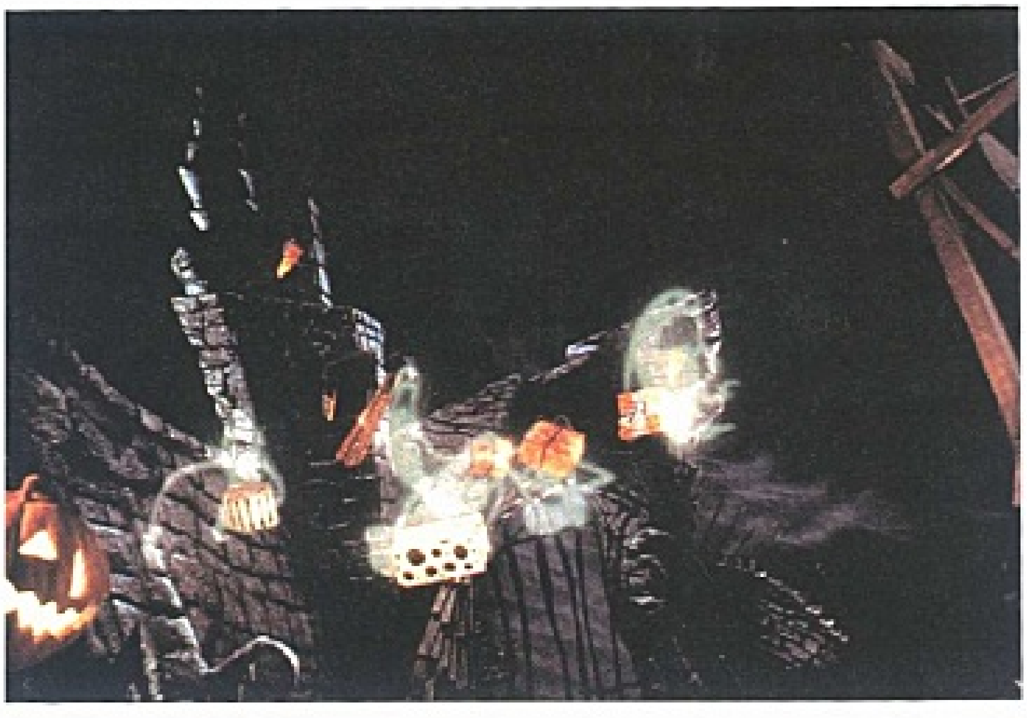
At other times the effects are combined with the animation during the postproduction process. For example, after Baker drew a series of snowflakes in black ink on white paper, they were photographed in negative and combined with the scene, where the snowflakes are seen as white. "I've done snowflakes, steam, some fire effects, radio waves that emanate from a tower," Baker notes. "Most of the things I've done are in black-and-white; then they add color later with gels or an optical process."

The effects animators' work is not meant to be noticed by the audience. Take the dramatic sequence in which Jack, dressed as a scarecrow,





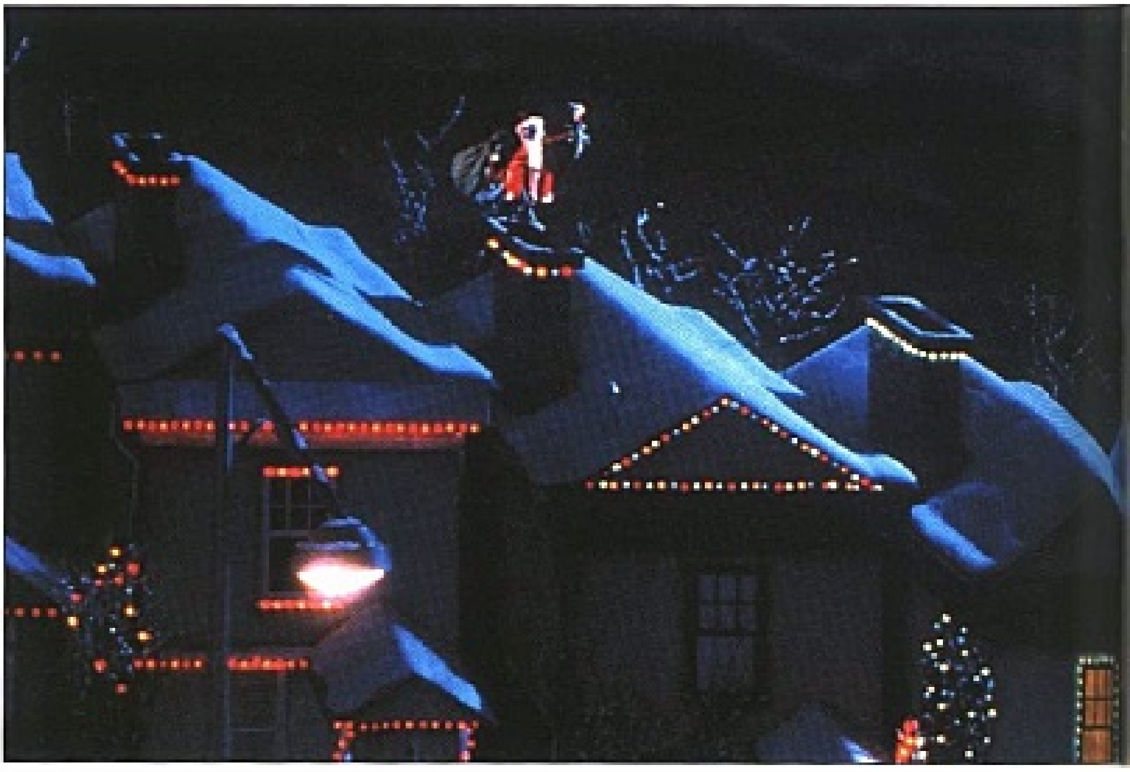


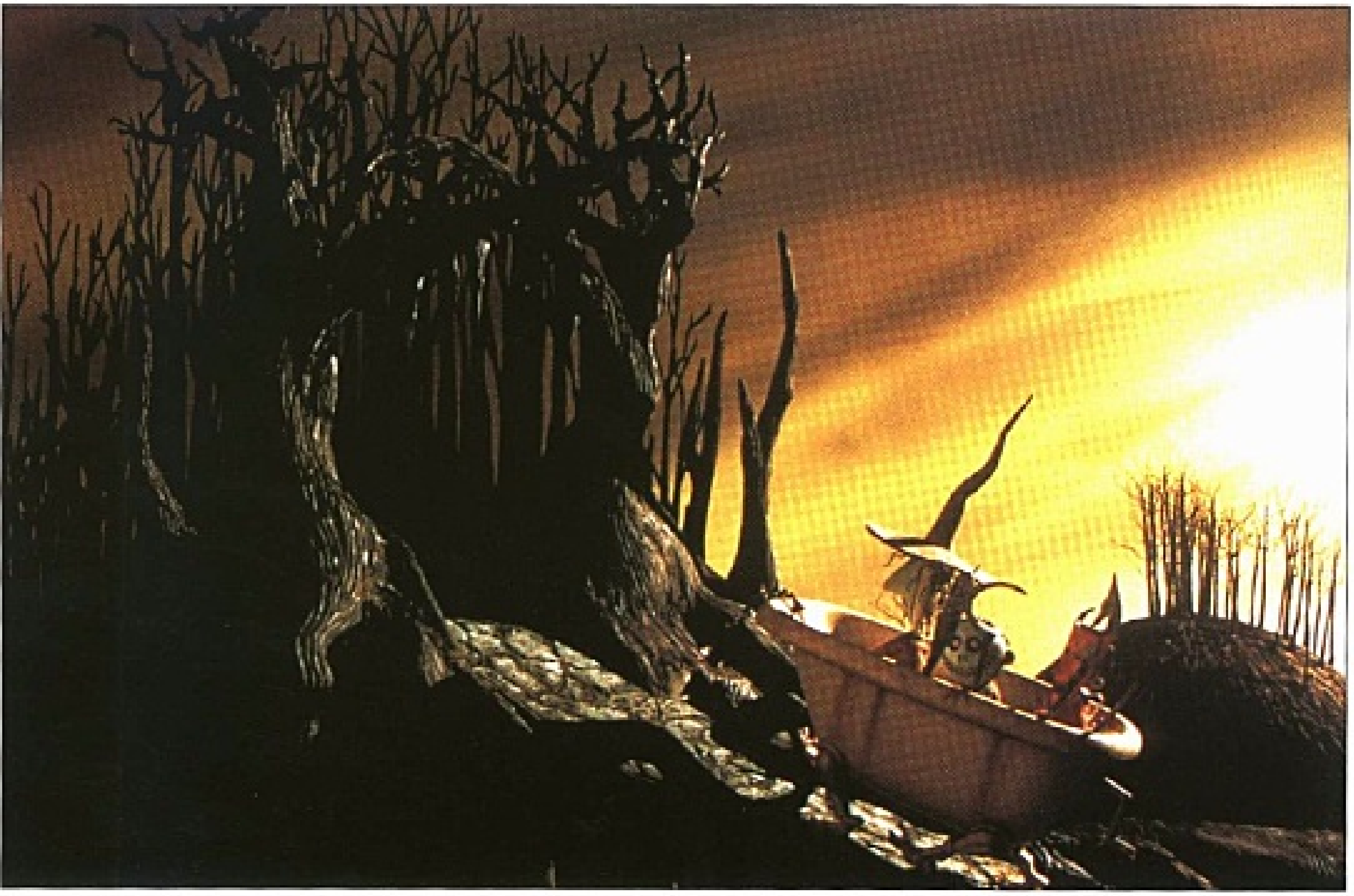


Gordon Baker (opposite, left) looks at a rough video test of effects animation of some ghosts carrying packages. To create the ghosts, the effects animators first took the work print of a frame (opposite, right) and traced the outlines of the packages and other elements they needed to consider (top left). After sketching the ghosts in pencil (top right), they inked them in (above), creating a cel. They did this for each frame in the shot, before checking the results on video. In the final print of the film (left), the two-dimensional ghosts blend in with the three-dimensional set.

catches fire. Here the three-dimensional and two-dimensional elements blend seamlessly. The part where Jack lights the torch was filmed with real flames. But when he brings the torch to his mouth, effects animation came into play. The flames that dance across his body as he somersaults into the fountain are drawings added to the picture in postproduction. Yet, because everything else is three-dimensional, the flames seem equally real. That is the power of this kind of effects animation.

The efforts of many hands come together in the final film. And in the movie theater, when Jack disappears down a chimney (right), Lock, Shock, and Barrel set off in their walking tub (below), the Easter Bunny and the Behemoth stare in mutual surprise (opposite, right), or Sally picks a flower outside the gates of Jack's house (opposite, bottom), the audience is left with the magical sense of a make-believe world that somehow really exists.





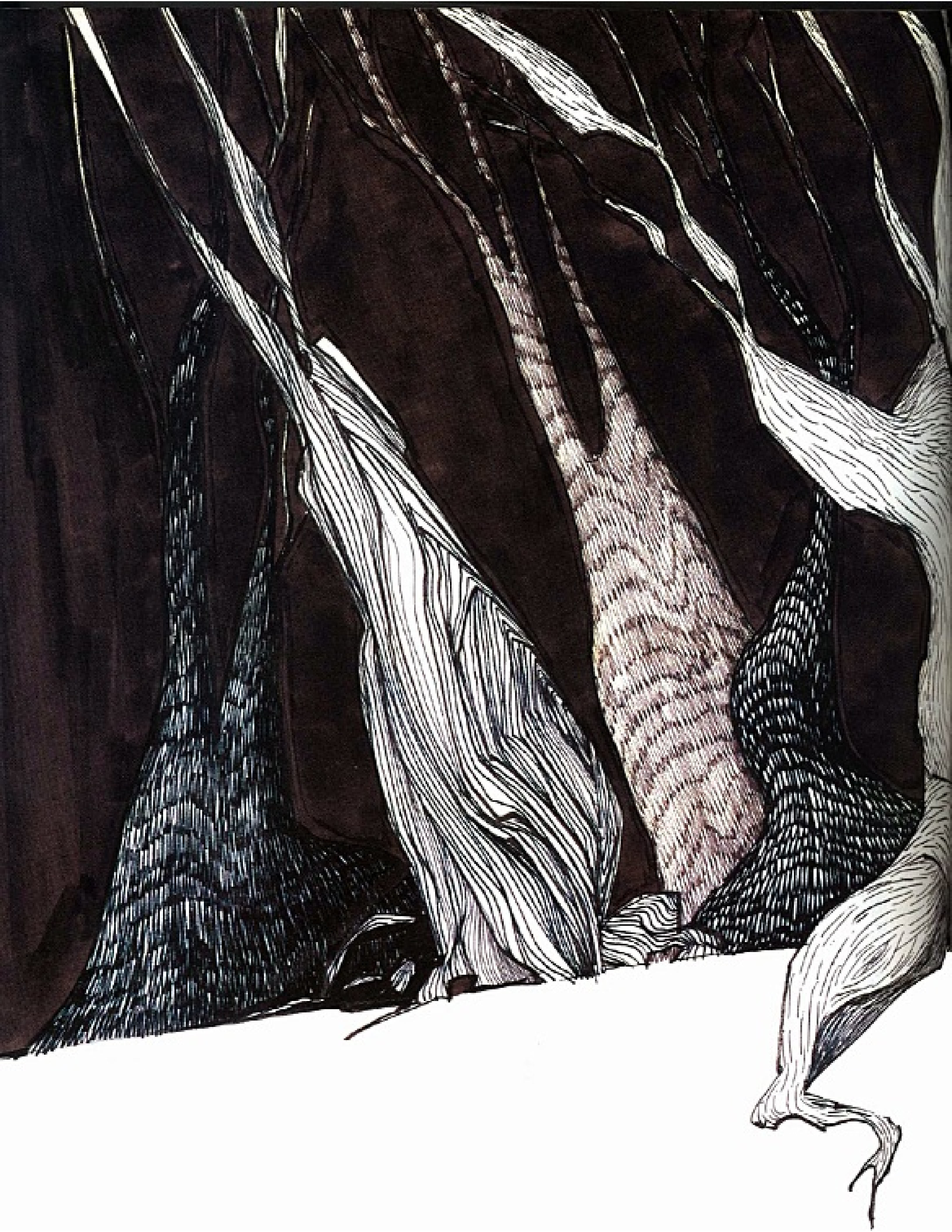
THE FINISHED PRODUCT

Nightmare Before Christmas took well over a decade to grow from Tim Burton's original poem and sketches to the groundbreaking feature film. But for everyone who had a hand in its production, the wait was definitely worthwhile.

"It's a very rich film," emphasizes sculptor Norm DeCarlo, "there's so much going on. Tim and Henry not only asked for but demanded a high level of acuity in detail and design. Working on this picture has been nothing but fun. There's nothing better than to be able to stretch your imagination and challenge your abilities."

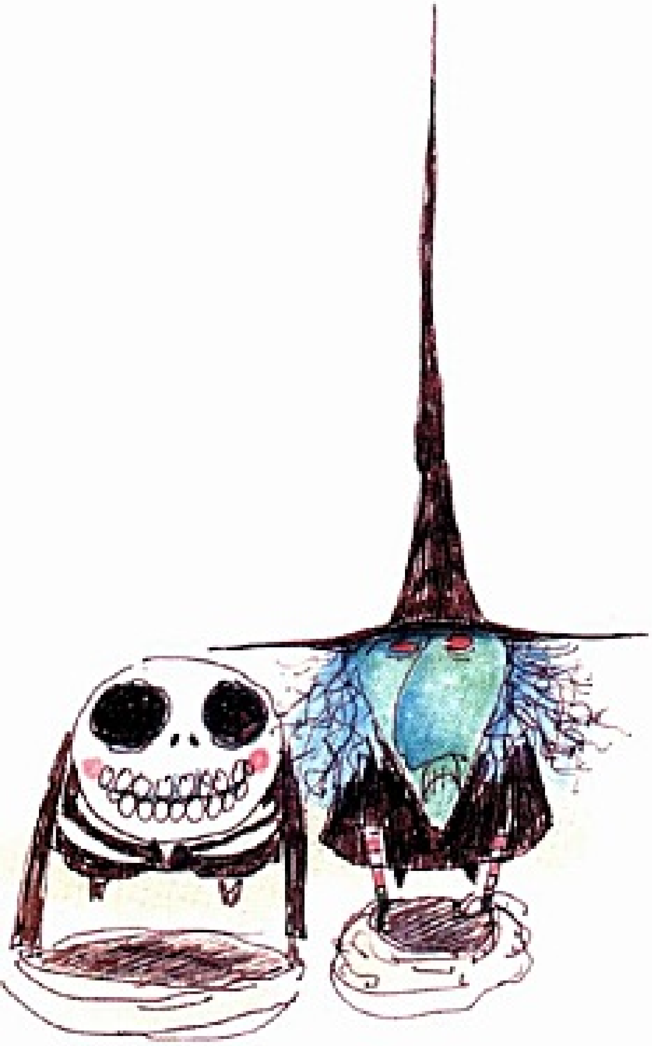
Animator Angie Glocka adds, "I think people will really like this movie, particularly if they are Tim Burton fans. It's a really sweet film. It looks a little scary, but it isn't forbidding. I think it's a good kid's film. But it's a good grown-up film, too."

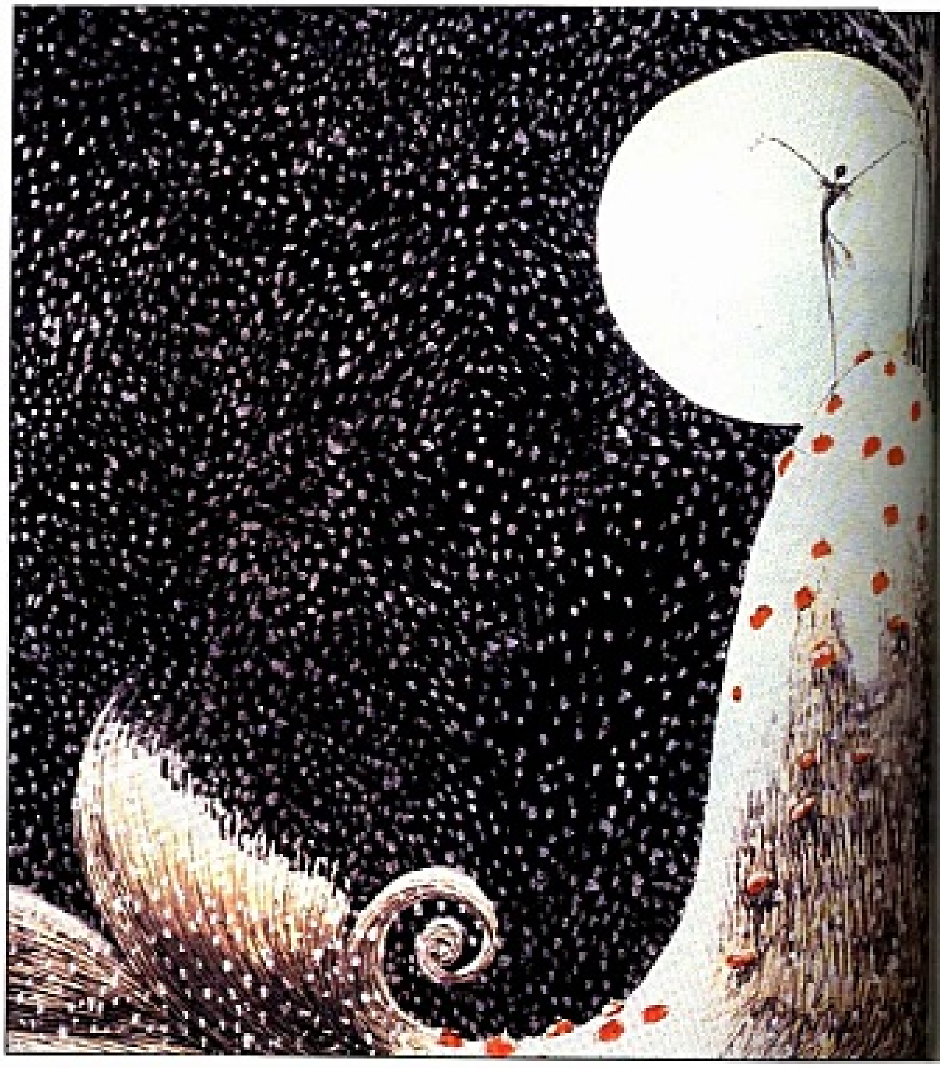
For Tim Burton, this film represents the satisfaction of realizing a dream that has occupied him for a third of his life. "You have to care about everything you do," he says, "but this film is special for me. The characters are very personal to me. Sometimes you're sitting there drawing and you don't even know what you're doing; it comes straight from your subconscious. This film has all the elements I wanted for it: the holidays (I love both Halloween and Christmas), beautiful but misunderstood characters, drama, sadness, optimism. When I watch it now, after having had it in me for so long," he sighs deeply, "I love it."



The Vision

Tim Burton likes to explore new ways of looking at things—for example, taking giant Polaroids of his puppets (right). At Tim Burton Productions, he and his energetic production executives, Jill Jacobs and Diane Minter, are involved in developing new projects, publishing, and merchandising. His drawings, such as his early sketches of Barrel and Shock (below) and a rendering of Jack welcoming Santa's gift of snow (below right), are always crucial to his vision.





TIM BURTON

Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas represents an unusual collaboration. It definitely reflects Burton's initial vision and shows the mark of his hand. At the same time it owes much of its impact to its director, Henry Selick.

The two men first formed a bond out of their frustration while working at Disney Studios in the early eighties. "Neither Henry nor I was really in our element at Disney," Burton says. "I did some design work for *The Black Cauldron* (1985) that never got used and worked on about ten projects that never got off the ground. Henry was also working on a lot of projects that never got made. He couldn't take it there anymore. So we struck up a friendship." Burton laughs, "A 'Where the hell are we?' sort of thing."

"In the art and film world," Selick explains, "you find out that there are five people out there who are very much like yourself, and you're either going to work well together or hate each other and be jealous of one another. Fortunately, Tim Burton and I get along well; we share a lot of common interests. We live on the same planet—if not in the same neighborhood—in our sensibilities."

Although little of Burton's early work made it into Disney feature films, he did make two short films at the studio that expressed his unique point of view. The first, *Vincent* (1982), is a stop-motion film about a little boy (who strongly resembles Burton) who is obsessed with horror stories. *Vincent* is narrated by Burton's hero, Vincent Price.

"It was a weird time at Disney, and some things slipped through the cracks," Burton notes. "I think *Vincent* was just something they let slide."

Burton admits that "it was nice for a couple of years to just sit in a room and draw whatever you wanted." It gave him a chance to explore and play with some of his ideas. But, he adds, "After a period of time it felt like I was locked in the room."

Before Burton left Disney, he made a second film, *Frankenweenie* (1984), which was intended to accompany a re-release of Disney's classic *Pinocchio* (1940). *Frankenweenie* is about a little boy whose dog is hit by a car and killed. The boy revives the dog, Frankenstein-style. Like *Vincent*, *Frankenweenie* was designed by Burton's friend Rick Heinrichs, who has worked as a visual consultant on all of Burton's movies except *Batman*. Filmed in black-and-white, this live-action short is both wonderfully funny and oddly disturbing—something that can be said of most, if not all, of Burton's subsequent films.

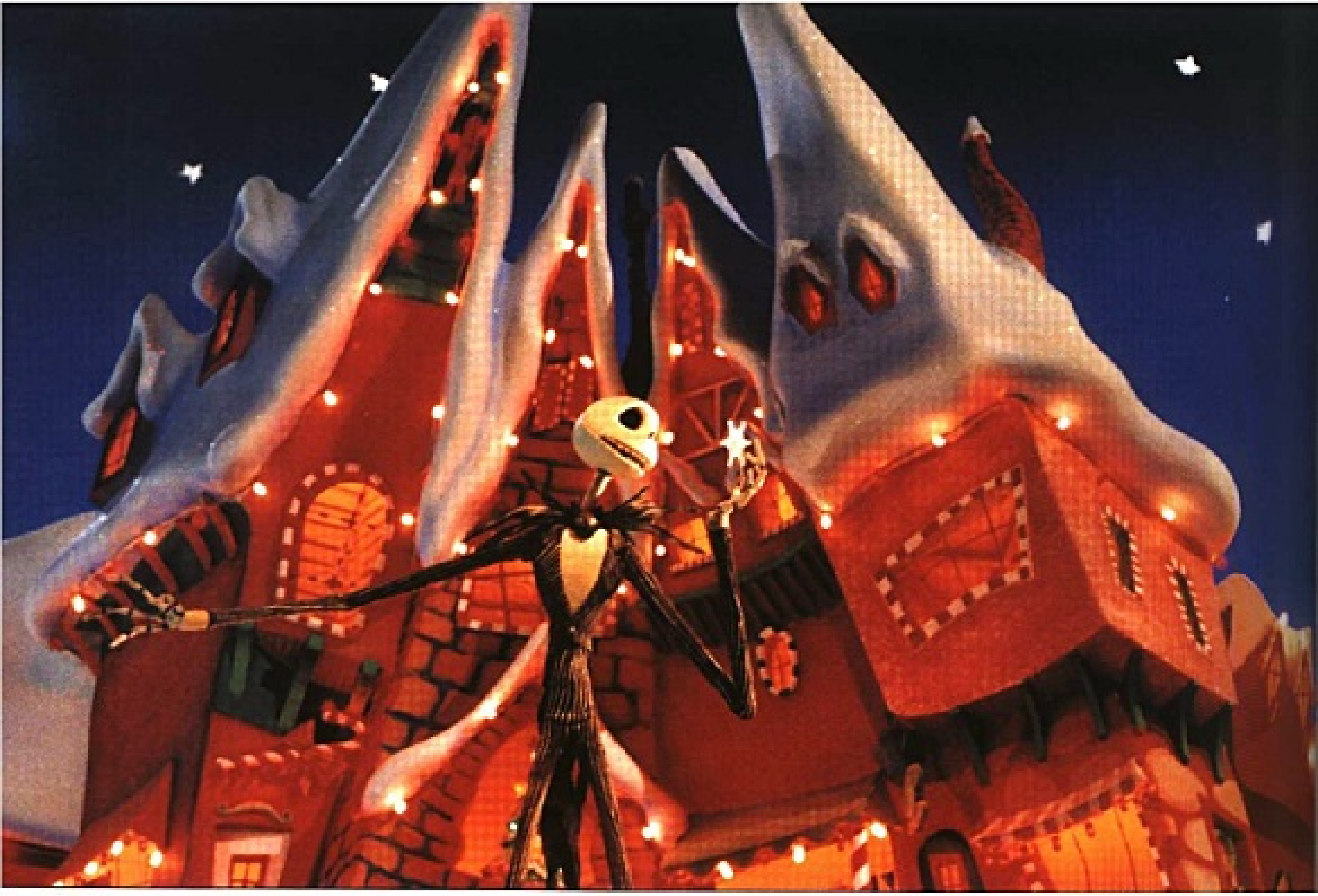
Burton's vision may be unusual, but it is the opposite of chilling. When, for example, Jack wanders alone in despair through the forest (below), he seems all too human.

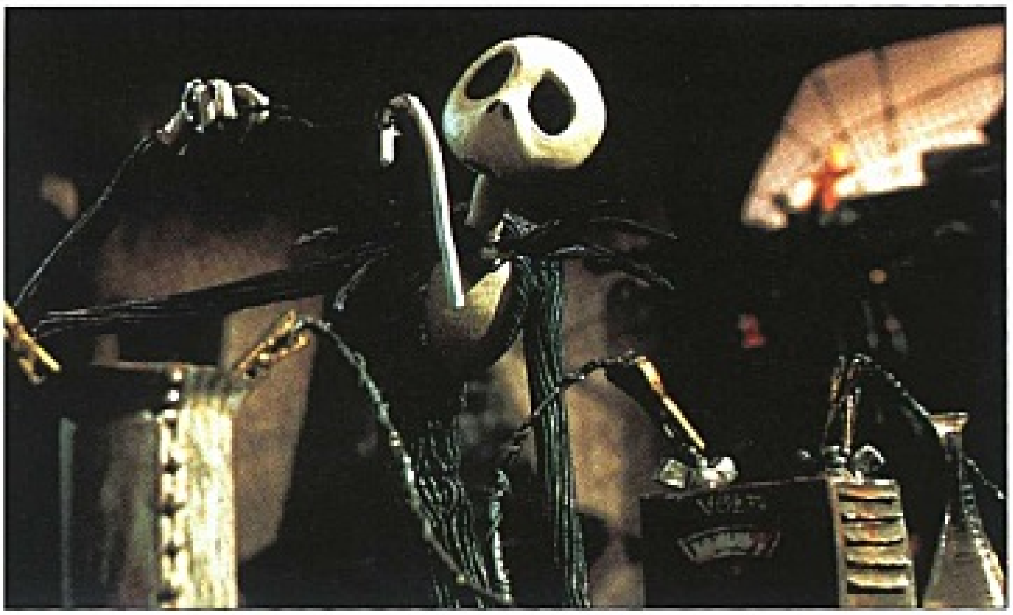
"When Disney saw *Frankenweenie,*" Burton laughs, "they freaked out. The company was at a real transitional stage, and everybody was more afraid than usual. That's when I left."

A wide grin spreads across Burton's face. "So now," he says, "over ten years later, *Frankenweenie* gets released on video and *Nightmare Before Christmas*—which the studio originally rejected—gets made."

From *Vincent* and *Pee-wee's Big Adventure,* through *Edward Scissorhands* and *Batman,* to *Nightmare Before Christmas,* the leading characters in Burton's films are outsiders, misfits who live in worlds of their own. "There are things about me you can never know," Pee-wee Herman tells his would-be girlfriend Dottie. "Things you wouldn't understand. Things you couldn't understand. Things you shouldn't understand. I'm a loner, Dottie. A rebel."

Some of Burton's characters, like Pee-wee, are happy in the bizarre





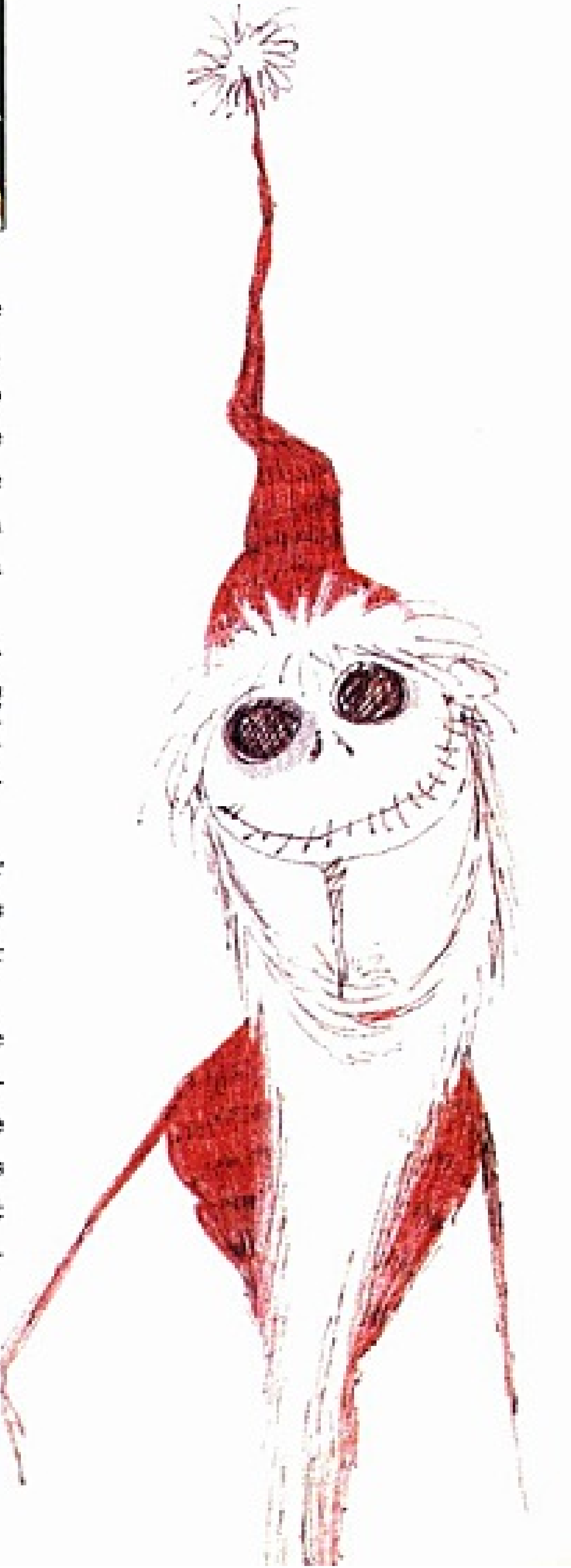
Whether he is marveling at a snowflake in Christmas Town (opposite) or trying to get at the essence of a candy cane while conducting experiments in his tower (left), Jack Skellington has a boyish charm—"a lot of passion and energy," as Burton puts it. Burton's many drawings of Jack (such as the one below) capture this quality.

little worlds they inhabit. Others, like *Nightmare*'s Jack Skellington, are consumed with a longing for something different, something better. Edward Scissorhands longs to embrace the girl he loves, but can never do so because of the razor-sharp shears at the ends of his arms. Bruce Wayne is driven by his own dark obsessions to dress in a bat suit and roam the forbidding streets of Gotham City, doling out vigilante justice. Even though Burton's characters may temporarily attach themselves to a greater community, in the end they have only themselves.

Burton indicates that he is saddened by "society's tendency to categorize everyone." In part that's why he loves movie monsters like King Kong, Frankenstein's creation, the Creature from the Black Lagoon. "I feel for these characters," he confesses. "They're not bad; people are torturing them, attacking them."

Jack Skellington is Burton's way of reversing the movie monster stereotype. "He has a lot of passion and energy," Burton claims. "He's always looking for something. That's why I love him; he's looking for a feeling."

Burton emphasizes that "everyone has two sides to them." He believes, "it's a real struggle to go through life and figure things out—determining which is the dark side and which is the light." This attitude comes out in his characters. "There's something about my characters that goes against the grain of what the culture walks you into. It's not something I think about. It's not something that I go after. It's something that I can't help but feel."



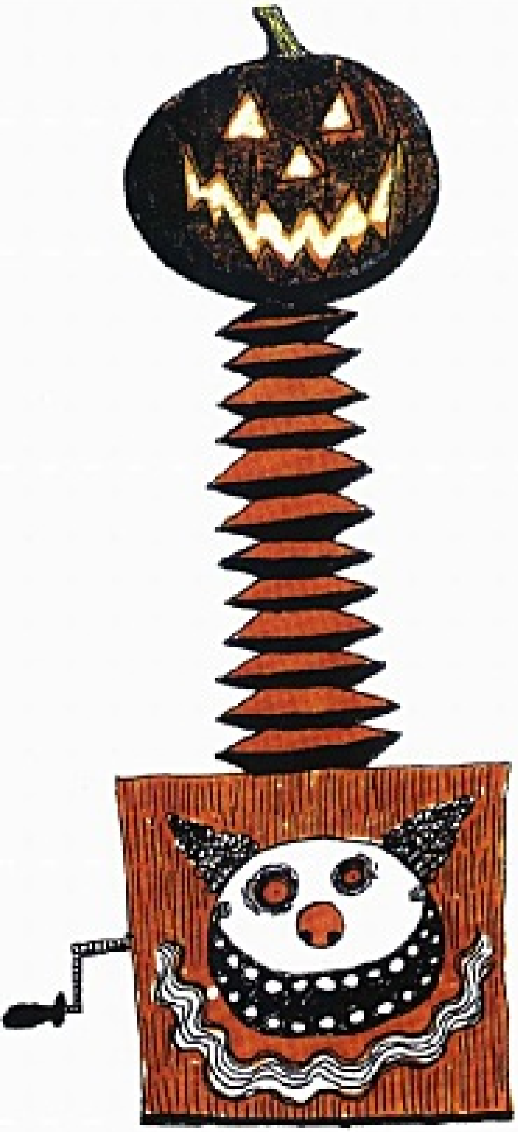
HENRY SELICK

Although the very title of the film—*Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas*—proclaims Burton's contribution, Selick, as its director, remains a key creative voice. "Tim Burton gave us a great story, great characters, a mood, a look, and we were able to turn it into a film," Selick says.

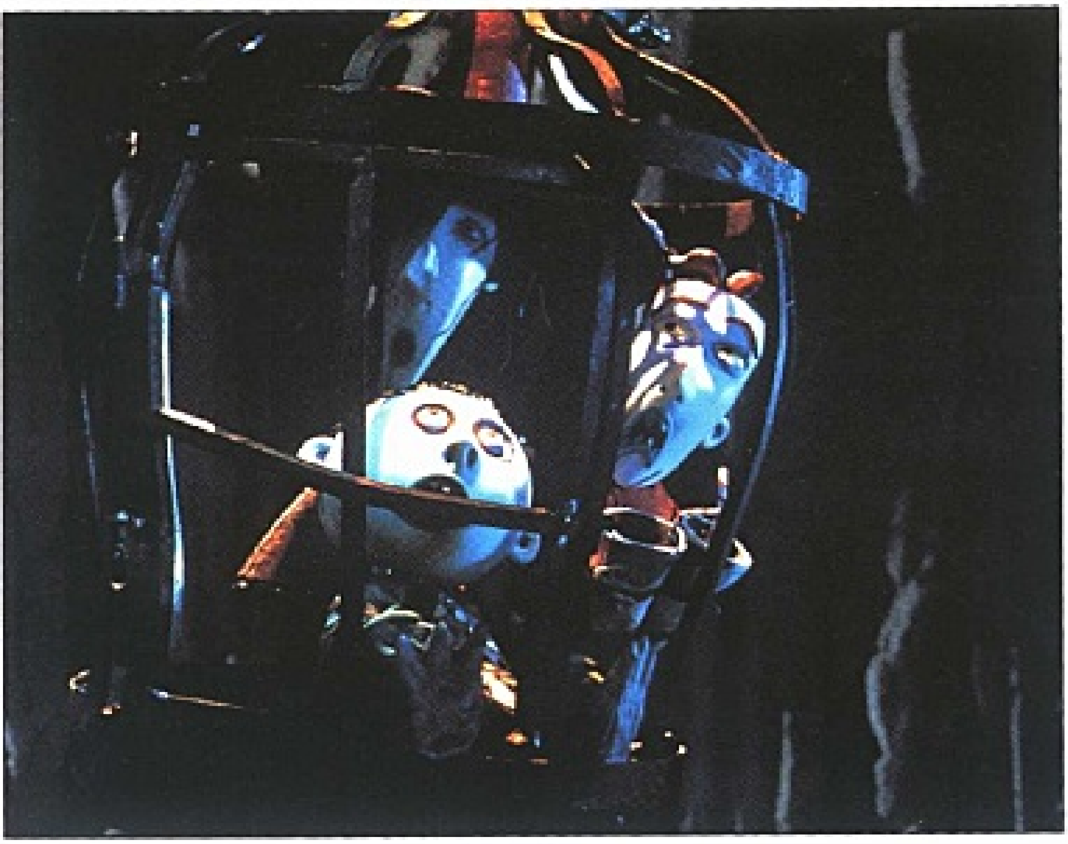
"I think Burton's influence is obvious," states supervising animator Eric Leighton. "But there's a lot more of Henry Selick's vision in this movie. To me, it looks more similar to some of the films I've worked on with Henry than to *Batman*."

In the eyes of co-producer Kathleen Gavin, *Nightmare* is decidedly a joint effort. She points out that even though this was a very special project for Burton, he entrusted it to another artist. That in itself is a strong tribute to Selick's abilities.

Selick's name is already familiar to many stop-motion connoisseurs. *Nightmare* is only the latest in a long line of beautiful, sometimes surreal, sometimes downright peculiar, films that he has directed. Most notable is a strange and intriguing short called *Slow Bob in the Lower Dimensions* (1990). Included in the Twenty-third International Tournee of Animation, this film was a major step forward creatively for Selick.



Selick explains, "I worked much more hands-on on all my films before *Slow Bob*. They were short films (*Seepage,* with life-size stop-motion



Burton and Selick (shown together, left and right respectively, in the photo opposite) were in constant communication, working well together. Although Burton was involved at every stage, Selick was at the studio every day overseeing work on the film: approving sketches (like the one for a Halloween toy opposite, far left), checking finished puppets (like the Mayor, below), and—most important—closely directing the animation in all the shots (as in the one at left of Lock, Shock, and Barrel staring with terror when Jack reappears after they thought he was dead).

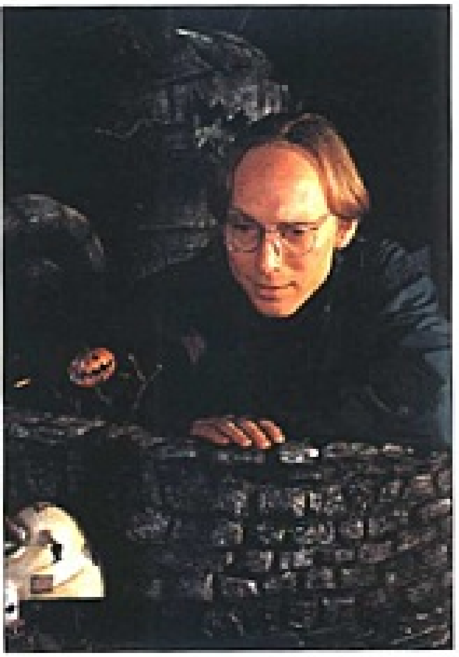
figures; *Phases,* on animal metamorphosis exercise) and pieces for MTV (*Haircut M, Mask M, Xerox M,* etc.), on which I would write, produce, direct, storyboard, edit, build sets and puppets, and often animate, design, light, and make the coffee. On *Slow Bob* I took a big step up in the art of delegating."

Slow Bob is, in a way, a direct ancestor of *Nightmare Before Christmas.* They share an eerie beauty, an eccentric point of view, and a high level of technical excellence. This isn't surprising since, as Selick notes, "The core group that did *Slow Bob* is the group that's doing this movie." Supervising animator Eric Leighton, set supervisor Bo Henry, director of photography Pete Kozachik, editor Stan Webb, mold-making supervisor John Reed, animators Trey Thomas and Owen Klatte, and model makers Bill Boes and Merrick Cheney worked on both films.

Selick recalls his first impression of *Nightmare,* when Burton was developing the idea at the Disney Studios. "It was one of the most interesting projects I'd ever seen," he says. "Tim drew a sequence of Jack Skellington walking in the forest, discovering the secret doors to the holiday worlds, and Rick Heinrichs designed some sculptures of Jack and his dog Zero, which were just beautiful. So the beginnings of the film were planted in my mind over ten years ago."

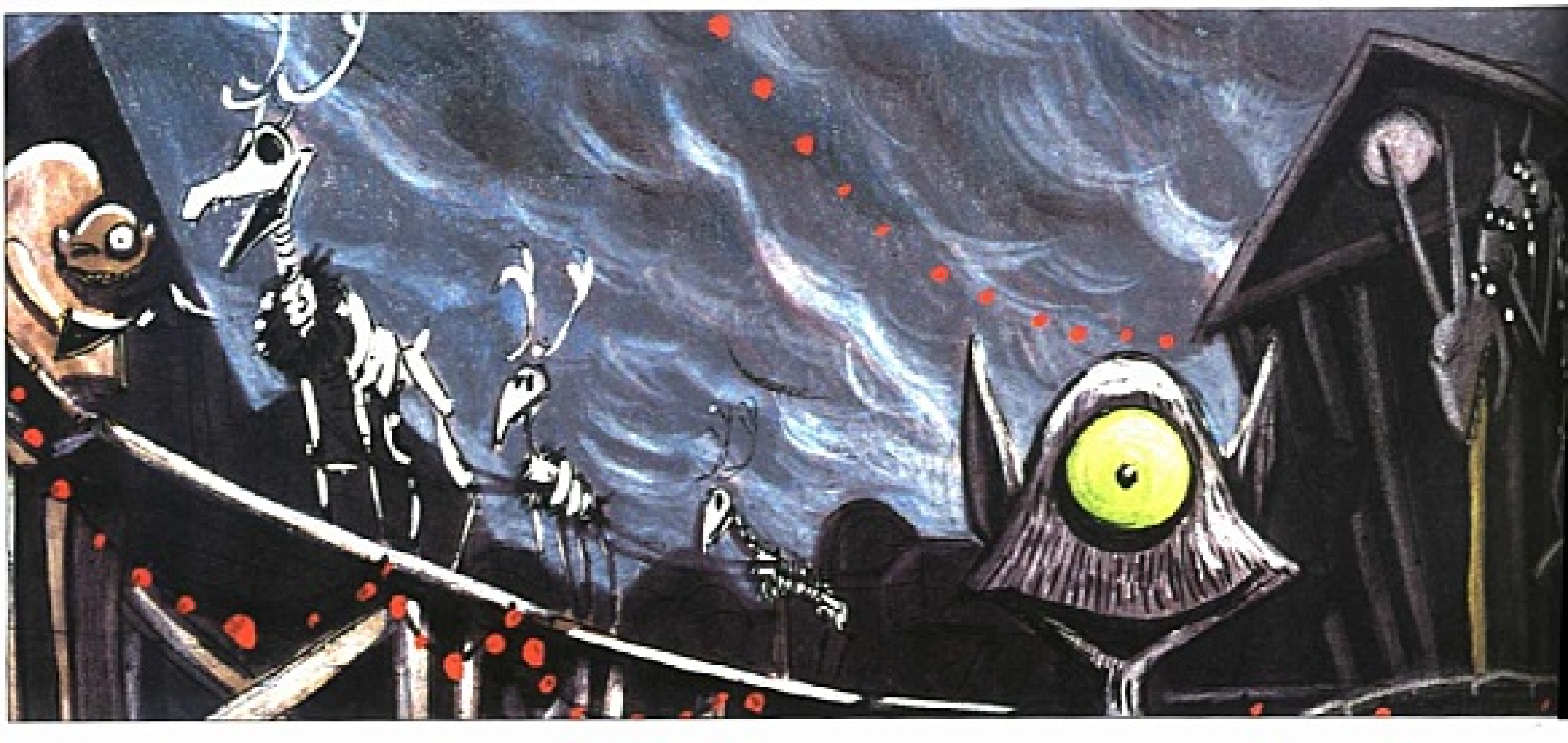
In 1990 Selick was approached by Heinrichs and told that, after a decade in cold storage, *Nightmare* was going to be produced. According to Burton, Selick was "the only person I could think of who could pull this thing together. He is an artist, a wonderful animator."

Directing a stop-motion animated film is very different from directing a live-action movie. For one thing, the stop-motion director never gets to yell, "Action" or "Cut." For another, the stop-motion director doesn't work directly with the actors—only with the artists who make the actors act.



In the initial months of production, Selick spent his days going over the script with the story department, translating the script into storyboards, and discussing with various artists every aspect of the film's drama and design. "Very often," he says, "I'd have people do fifty or a hundred drawings of a sequence. Then I'd go back, rework it, pull shots, shift them around. When I agreed on the sequence we'd shoot the drawings on film and edit those. Then we'd redraw and rework the sequence and start all over again."

At the same time the characters were being designed, and the sets, props, color, and lighting were being developed. Selick's job involved making the rounds to each department, making decisions on even the most minute detail. Throughout, Selick constantly referred to Burton's original drawings, which influenced any new characters being designed.



He also worked closely with Heinrichs on the visual design of the film.

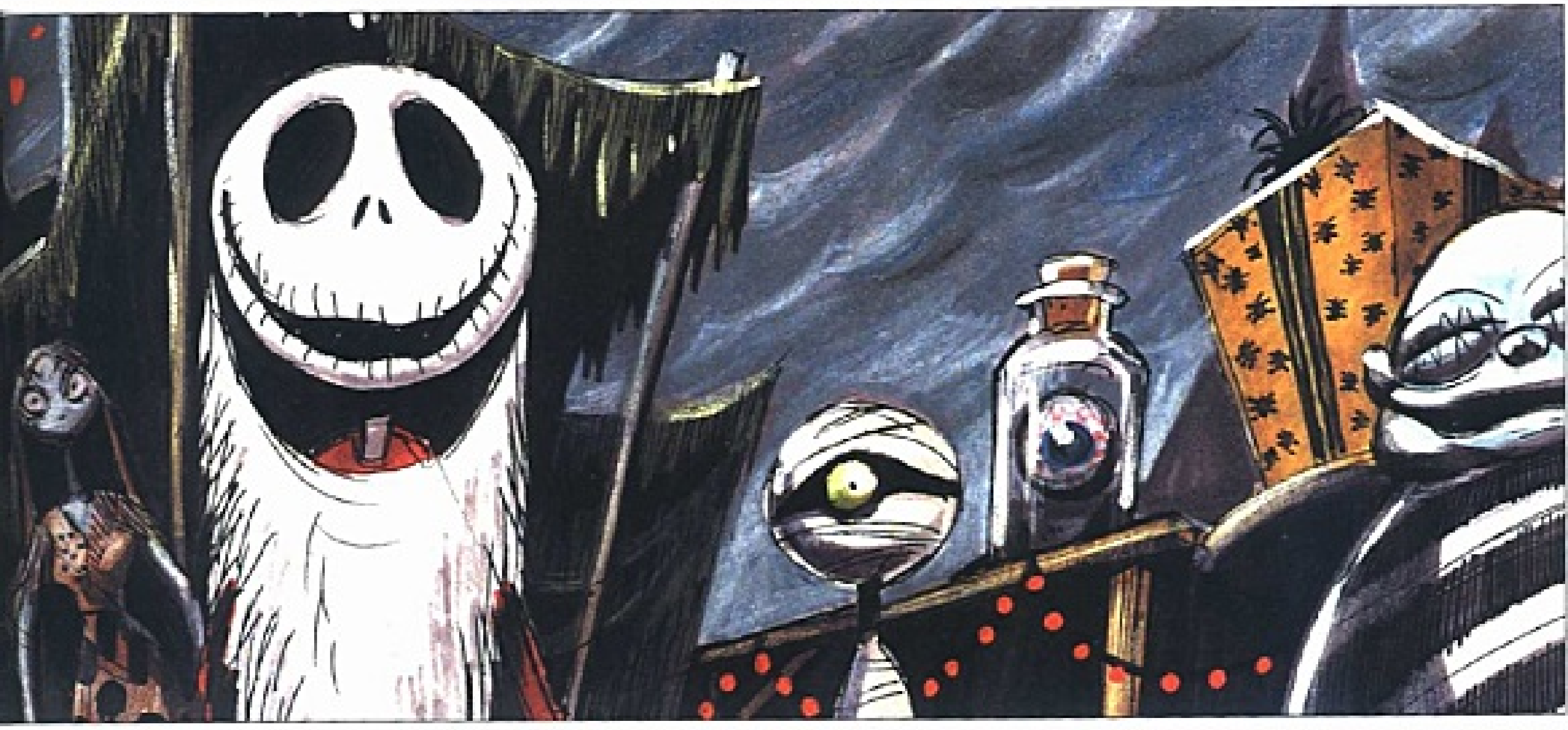
As design turned into production, Selick's job got far more complex. Every morning he screened "dailies" (the previous day's output), working with animators on a frame-by-frame examination of the completed shots. "There were so many camera stages going at this point," he explains, "that I would spend the entire morning looking at shots and working on various stages of shot development."

In the afternoons Selick initiated discussions of new shots, going over every facet with the animators, as well as the camera, light, and prop people. He also made the rounds of every department, offering suggestions, making decisions, giving orders, asking questions.

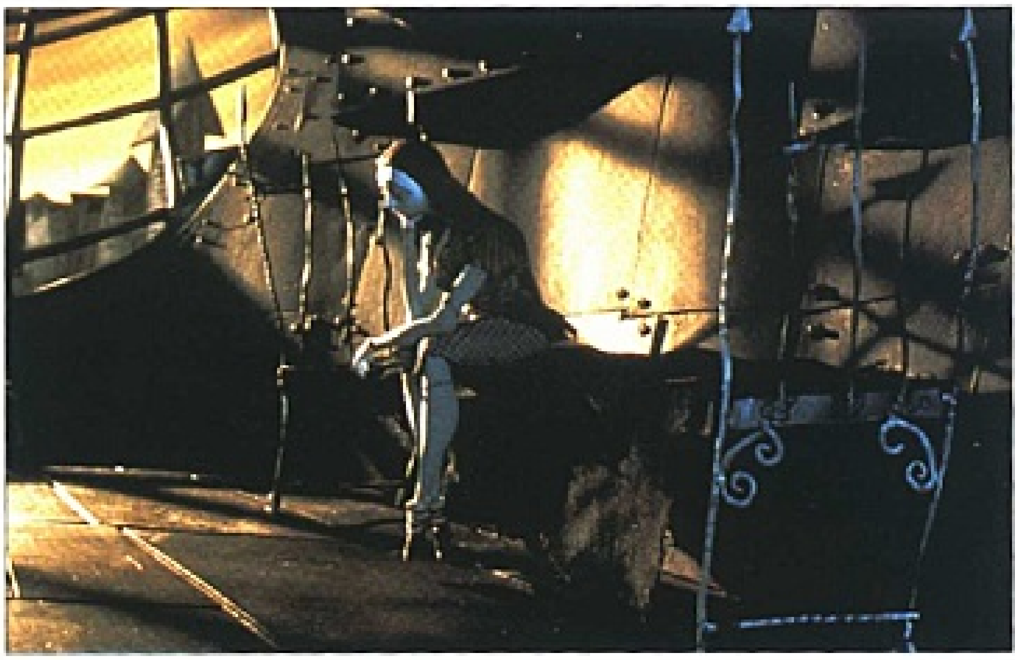
"My days were packed," Selick reflects. "The main thing is, I had my fingers on everything, but not constantly. My supervisors were so good that they could carry the ball for a long time. But it was important that I was at dailies every day, approving or influencing every shot."

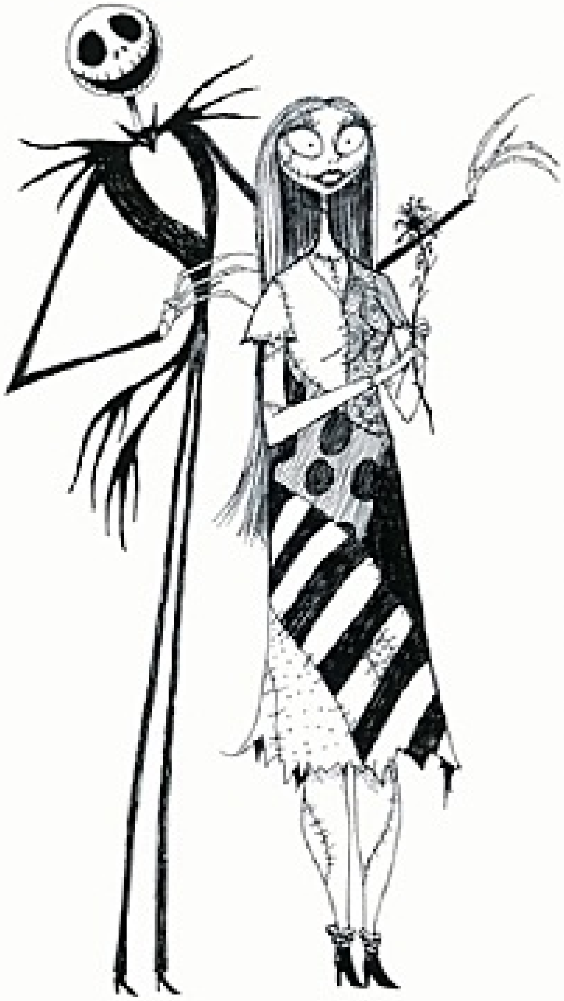
The result of Selick's hard work is a brilliant, one-of-a-kind film that catapults the art of stop-motion animation to a new level. As Selick puts it, "This is by far the most ambitious stop-motion animated film ever done. It has the best budget, the highest caliber of talent, and it's by far the most artistically beautiful and interesting. This isn't just puppets; it's a whole world. After five minutes the audience will believe in that world, in the relationships and the story we're telling."

Selick's sense of fun allowed him to enter into the puppets' world (opposite). His input contributed to every drawing of a scene, such as this rendering of Santa's first view of Halloween Town when Jack opens up the sack.



One of Thompson's most important contributions was to give Sally a believable personality with some spunk. Although at times Sally (like Jack) bemoans her fate (right), she takes action to get what she wants and do what she thinks is right. Thompson also helped develop characters like the Mayor, who travels around Halloween Town in his executive hearse (shown in a prop design opposite, bottom).





by the time she got involved, she was more than a little aware of the project, as she knew every song by heart."

"Clearly, when we needed someone to come in and pull it all together," Elfman continues, "Caroline was the natural choice. She was already indoctrinated into the project. She actually heard every song before Tim did, because I tried them out on her. 'Let me just run this by you,' I'd call out as she climbed up the stairs."

Elfman's songs told the basic story, forming the core of the film. But there were still gaps in between, where the story needed to be filled in. "It was a strange objective," Thompson comments. "I had to write a story to thread Danny's songs together, to fill out characters who weren't fully formed."

Elfman and Burton were busy fleshing out the songs, and Henry Selick and an initial crew of artists at Skellington Productions in San Francisco were already hard at work creating preliminary storyboards and designing characters, sets, and props. When Thompson officially signed on as *Nightmare*'s screenwriter, she found herself in the slightly uncomfortable position of attempting to impose a structure on a film that was already going nearly full steam. "I felt like I had to design the house after everybody was living in it," she says.

As a first step, Thompson went away and wrote a complete script. But that was far from the end. She then sent her script to Skellington Productions in San Francisco, where the storyboard artists reimagined her words in visual terms. They then faxed new images to Thompson, and

Production

Production Manager: Phil Lofaro
Auditor: Kevin Reher
Production Coordinators: Jill Kuzicka, George Young
Artistic Coordinator: Allison Abbate
Stage Coordinator: Alia Agha
Stage Manager: Robert Anderson
Assistant to Producer/Director: Gisela Hermeling
Assistant Auditor: Jenny Spamer
Assistant Production Coordinator: Kat Miller
Assistant Artistic Coordinator: Shane Francis
Production Assistants: Susan Alegria, Jon Angle, Thomas Buchanan, David Burke, Daniel Campbell, Anne Etheridge, David Janssen, Denise Rottina, Beth Schneider, Kirk Scott, Arianne Sutner, David Teller